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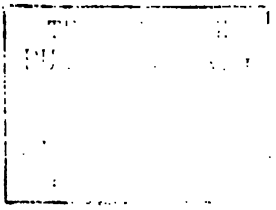
THE FORAY of the HENDRIK HUDSON

FRANK MACKENZIE SAVILE

THE FORAY
OF THE
"HENDRIK HUDSON"



"HE WAITED TILL THE RISE SHOULD GIVE HIM AIM."

The Foray

OF THE

"Hendrik Hudson"

A Tale of '54

BY

FRANK MACKENZIE SAVILE

Illustrated by

GEORGE WILLIS BARDWELL

NEW YORK . *Frederick A. Stokes Company* . PUBLISHERS

[1902]
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Published in September, 1902.

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A PRAESCRIPT.

OUT of the grey emptiness of the Baltic the slow, sullen waves were rolling, thudding on the sands of the little rock-ringed bay with monotonous, rhythmic fall. The horizon was an uncertain merge of sea and sky unbroken by a single sail. The swish of the lagging breakers made a never-ending drone, swallowing all lesser sounds into a stillness. From out the deep the mighty swellings marched upon the strand—moving silences of resistless power. But for the seabirds that perked and preened their white bosoms upon the dark rocks, the place seemed void, lifeless, desolate.

Yet behind one of the smooth, tide-worn boulders something moved—something that picked and snatched at the pebbles with white, nerveless fingers, clawing at them

aimlessly. Beneath the shadow of the rock crouched a man, bearded, long-haired, in filthy rags, swart with the dust of road and field, animal, savage, huddling to the stone like a laired jackal,

At his feet lay a cup—a tall, richly chased, double-handed beaker, gleaming yellow with the sheen of gold unalloyed. Ringed round it on the sand lay a necklet of amber beads, each pellet large as a cherry and locked to its neighbor by thick strands of virgin metal.

The lean fingers toyed and twisted the circle of beads into a hundred shapes and coronals, and as the human beast lifted up its voice now and again, a mirthless laugh cleft the unending beat of the surges. The harsh rasp of it cut the echoes horribly, and circling in their poised squadrons overhead the terns wailed an answering plaint. From far inland out of the gathering dusk came a long-drawn throaty call—the howl of the wolf leading the famished pack afield.

There were other wolves astir than those

gaunt scavengers of the night. Behind the ring of rocks that ridged landward, behind the bay, another man cowered and watched hungrily the ragged waif upon the sand. His eyes gleamed tigerishly; his hands grasped with knotted muscles the tags of seaweed beside him; half leaning, half squatting, his loins heaved with the violence of his pulses, swaying his body uncertainly. Now and again he left his strict espial into the cove and swept his gaze impatiently inland. Down upon the pebbles the restless vagrant churned the sand and wreathed the necklet ceaselessly, and his vain, joyless laugh rang in idle repetition across the rocks.

At the sound the spy shook with angry tension, and his body arched as if to spring. So might a coward wolf have crouched beside a slow-dying bullock.

Suddenly across a glade of the haggard pine forest behind him, three distant figures showed in black, moving dots. In one of his swift peerings across the tumble of boulders they caught his eye.

For a second he hesitated; then, with a last look at the wretch who still threshed and crooned upon the pebbles, he turned and ran, bending almost to his belly among the tangle of granite slabs between the foreshore and the forest.

It was with the slinking travel of a stoat rather than the gait of a man that he sped into the twilight of the pines, twisting his way among the dark trunks; it was with a stoat's sudden, silent uprising that he emerged into the path and stood before three grey-coated soldiers.

The leader, with the chevrons of a sergeant on his sleeve, looked at him as a terrier might at the ferret who thrusts out the rat into his jaws. His face was a concentrated sneer as he found his voice in a single word.

"Well?" he queried.

"All is well, little father. I have tracked him. Some of the spoil lies beside him openly."

In the excitement of his reply he drew up

to the soldier, and his eyes gleamed into the other's repugnant face; his hands worked one within another clammily.

The sergeant fell back with a gesture of disgust.

"Ugh!" he grunted, "lead on, sleuth-hound."

For a single instant a malicious spasm crossed the eager face—the white teeth shone with a snarl. Then the bent shoulders dropped back into their grovel of deference, and the human stoat began to wind among the tumbled rocks again as he had come. The sergeant and his two apathetic companions followed, their military uprightness sadly broken by the yawning clefts.

Down upon the sands the outcast still smote childishly at his sheltering mass of granite and looped his amber beads. Nor did he alter his position as the four advanced upon him. Only the nasal shrilling of his laughter brayed out rather more insistently upon the silence and prolonged itself into the echoes of the shore.

He scooped a handful of orange sand into his goblet and raised it to his mouth, pledging the new-comers in fantastic show. Then again his yelling travesty of mirth broke across the rush and backflow of the tide.

One of the waiting soldiers thrust his hand into his breast and touched the eikon that hung from his swarthy throat. He called softly the Good Saint's name to protect him from all deviltries.

The sergeant laid his hand roughly upon the ragged shoulder. "No more fooling," said he tersely. "Get up, dog!"

The wild, aimless hands still mowed the pebbles unheedingly, and the blurred eyes roved vacantly across the waste of waters. A flake or two of snow began to fall from the massed clouds.

Impatiently the sergeant kicked at the huddled limbs, cursing with a fierce oath their listless, inhuman swayings. The tossing, ungoverned hands stayed themselves into rigid surprise beneath the stroke of the

heavy boot. Then with a yell of furious pain the man-animal sprang upon his aggressor, tearing and worrying with blind bestial ferocity at his flesh. A crimson stain followed quick upon the leopard-like spring, smearing the coarse uniform. The two men fell together to earth, their strivings beating the pebbly strand as a pestle beats within a mortar. They lost themselves in an indistinguishable whirl of striving, oath-splitting rage.

The suddenness of the fray at first left the others motionless with amazement. Then with a shout they fell upon the twined furies of the fight, and tore their leader from the throttling hands of his assailant. It took three of them to restrain the madman's writhings; it was not till they had shackled him with the straps of their bandoliers that they had him under any control. With linked hands and ankles he rolled upon the sand, shrieking his unintelligible mouthings in a frenzy of fighting lust.

The blasphemies of the sergeant rose

from him like a cloud as he laved his torn limbs in the sea-water. "The accursed brute's a maniac," he shouted, "Wither and blast him. Why, in the name of Saint Paul and all Saints, did you let me handle the hog, you son of perdition?" he asked, fiercely, turning on the spy.

"One of noble birth," pled the other, "he shams. As there is a God in heaven, he makes pretence of this delirium to conceal his evil doings. Give me but leave to question him *with fear* and he shall tell me all—all, as I live."

"Do your devilmost," quoth the sergeant, with a coarse oath, as he turned again to the washing of his wound, and into the eyes of the man-stoat rose a light of unholy, hideous desire.

They stretched the kicking, writhing wretch upon the shore and piled rocks upon him, crushing his breath from him to the bare limits of existence. Between his bound fingers they burnt matches; beneath his nails they thrust splinters; after each

torture they plied him with one question—a single, monotonous query. Naught did they get save yells, that might have sprung from the ninth circle of the lost.

In his disappointment and lust for cruelty, the unsuccessful torturer suggested unprintable atrocities; the soldiers, already sickened into half mutiny, cursed him into silence. Finally, at a word from the leader, they heaved their chattering victim to his feet, unbound his lower limbs, and between them, forced him across the rocks forestward, They faded down the trail among the pines as the evening closed upon them, and the snow began to fall in earnest at last.

The great feathery flakes thickened and swirled in the air, carpeting the ground in swiftly piling layers. They fell upon the pines and spruces of the forest till each to the topmost bough was laden and drooping with the clinging weight. They covered and wiped out the dark trail as a schoolboy sponges his slate. The woods were putting

on their winter clothing—thick, woolly, as the bears that lived among them. They would not doff it till the spring. Night and snow wrapped them, as by curtains that ran upon a single rod.

The men stumbled along wearily, thrusting their prisoner before them. They cursed impartially the weather and their quest, nor forgot to spare an execration or two for their guide, who slunk ahead, wiping now and again the drifted snow from a pine trunk to seek the yellow blaze upon it. As the darkness deepened he did this with increasing difficulty, scrabbling at the flake-wrapped bolls with the nervous energy of despair. At every halt the sergeant swore with growing fervour and the wretched craven shook with dismal affright.

Faintly down the aisles of pine came a moaning drift-borne cry. Low, deep, and full it began, then swelled and shrilled to ravening discords of hunger and desire. The single, first-heard note lost itself in a tossing chorus of yells; leaping, echoing, they

smote apart the thick silences of the snow-bound forest. With gathering, swift-growing suddenness they filled the night; from every thicket they arose out of seeming emptiness; the roof of naked boughs cast them back to earth, as they rolled pealing down the arched avenues of trees; they linked themselves to the hiss and swirl of the gale.

The four and their prisoner were stumbling below a barrier of rocks-that edged the forest. Black clefts and crannies broke its overhanging face; the fearsome echoes beat upon it and were flung back as from a sounding board. Dark, lithe, snow-patched forms were about their path; the blaze of hot devouring eyes glinted from countless lairs among the boulders and bushes that fringed the crag foot; a thousand fang were bared upon them—yellow, snarling whetted for slaughter, lusting for blood.

The soldiers backed upon the rocks, and, with rifles at the ready, peered out into the night. Grovelling behind them, thrusting

at the sheer wall as if he would seek refuge in its pitiless breast, moaning, abject, huddled and scarce human, crouched the guide. Straddling across him, gibbering, calling, laughing aloud his gleeless mirth, churning the snow with shoeless feet, beating with bound hands upon the stones, stood the captive, and spurned the cowering wretch with his trampings.

A score of paces away the grey wolves ringed them in and licked their lean jaws. Thrusting and jostling one upon another they gaped upon their prey ravenously, lashing themselves by slow degrees to the desperation of attack.

The sergeant was muttering and cursing, fingering with nervous hands at the lock of his rifle.

He turned and with a kick and fierce oath quieted the whinings of the guide; at the same moment his glance rested on the prisoner. A peculiar expression passed his face. As one who acts on sudden impulse, he drew from his belt his sheathed knife,

and cut savagely at the lashings that bound the other's wrists. With the strength of despair—the despair that poises all on one last throw—he flung him forward almost into the jaws of the clamoring, fighting throng.

"Run, son of a dog, run," he roared. "Curses be thick on you—make into the forest."

With a yell that rang and shrilled unearthly above the baying of the pack, the madman smote flail-like upon the closed ranks of eager famine, bursting the serried line by mere force of impact and surprise. Out into the drift-swept avenues he leaped, and with hot teeth agleam and howls as from the Pit, the torrent of wolves swirled together and swept upon his track.

A short fifty yards he held his advantage; then with a snap the fangs of the leader met in his fleshless thigh.

Screaming, he turned and with maniac strength seized in each hand a white-toothed jaw and rent and split them one from each

other. As he cast away the torn and bloody mask, like a crested wave the pack flung itself upon him, bellowing for slaughter, snarling, tangled, biting with unseeing fury each other's twisted limbs.

Above the wretch's head a pine branch ran out, bent with the gales of scores of winters, frost shrunk, but gnarled to a sapless strength. Bleeding, desperate, shrieking, he raised and linked his tormented arms about it, and strong with his furious agony, swung himself up out of the wild hurtle of teeth and flying fur.

A score of disappointed raveners leaped at their escaping quarry, and scored and stripped the skin from him with straining teeth. Still shrieking, he dragged himself forward, and crawled horribly towards the trunk. The dark blood fell in gouts upon the snow, and the panting brutes below licked and sniffed at it with quarrellings.

Above, their torn victim climbed and mowed among the pine-needles to a higher shelter. As the friendly boughs closed

"A SCORE OF DISAPPOINTED RAVENERS LEAPED AT THEIR ESCAPING QUARRY."

about him, wrapping him in their warm, welcome shelter, veiling him from the yelling horde below, some tension snapped within him like the sudden parting of a fiddle string. A cry—gasping, inhuman, kin to the scream of the speared otter—rang out above the wild clamor of the pack. Limply he fell forward into the thickness of the knitted twigs and lay motionless. His body hung derelict like the wind-drift of a storm.

Beneath the living corpse the wolves swung round to seek for quicker meat. Back from the ruddy, trampled patch of snow they charged, filled with the fury that has tasted blood, in thick resistless column that stayed not for knife or gun.

Three shots rang out, and with howls of a thousand fiends they smote upon their prey. For thirty frightful seconds four swaying tangles of rending teeth and claws fought and churned the snow, while out of them burst oaths, shrieks, and the spurting blood of men. Then came quiet but for

the snarls of jealous raiders and the crunch of human bones.

One by one the glutted scavengers sought their lairs. The white light of the rising moon showed only scarlet tramplings and shreds of grey uniform where three rifles had fallen abroad. Among the pine-needles an inert body still lay without sign of life, like some high-tossed jetsam of the forest.

THE FORAY OF THE

"HENDRIK HUDSON"

CHAPTER I.

A HOSPITAL PATIENT.

"IT'S good to see you again, old man," said Barr, the house-surgeon. "The fat of prosperity's thick upon you. Heavens, what a skinny beggar you used to be, and now—Good Lord!"

The other man smiled richly. The mellow March sunshine glinted through the open window and enveloped him with a wealthy halo. His waistcoat was creased with complacent folds; he blew a long cloud of smoke and beamed upon his companion.

"It *is* good," he assented briefly. Then,

as the happy retrospect loosened his tongue, he became suddenly garrulous. "By Jove, Arthur, to think that it was only in '52 that I was a weary wound-dresser like you! And this is only '54—two years. It seems a lifetime, old boy."

Barr smiled back, but a little drearily. "It seems more than two years to me, but—for other reasons."

"Poor old chap," sympathized Desmond. "You've been tied to this old knackers' yard all that time, while I—Look here, Arthur, come with me. You've never tasted freedom yet. Come with me, old man; I'll show you. The sea, my boy, the boundless sea. Hackneyed phrase that, but My! it's so."

Barr shrugged his shoulders. "Thanks many, old man. Aw'f'ly good of you, but impossible."

"Is it?" queried the other. "That's where you make your mistake. The old 'Hendrik's' in dock now—refit and so forth—but next week I go out again upon the

waters. Come, Arthur. Come with me and be my love. You shall live—live the life of the blameless salt. You shall smell the sweet sea-smell instead of filthy antiseptics, learn the inside clinch or the fisherman's bend instead of the eternal bandage. You'll sleep the dreamless sleep of the surge-rocked mariner—poetry that—instead of 'Please, sir, No. 52's a-choking and a-coughing 'orrid.' "

Barr chuckled.

"Yes, they generally choose about 2 A. M. to wake up and spit," he answered with a twinkle. "It would be scrumptious to cut it for a bit, but—but—it's no good thinking of it. I daren't, old man. I should get the boot. I can't afford that."

The other gurgled gleefully, licking the butt of a new cigar. "Fact is, old chap," he said half apologetically, "I've arranged it. Met Sir William on the stairs. Deuced civil, he was. Mentioned old days when I dressed for him. Congratulated me on the splendid position to which I'd succeeded.

Had known Uncle Silas well. Heard my Norfolk shooting was among the best in England. Was it six or six-hundred and fifty brace we got when Lowndes was with me? Naturally I took the hint," and the speaker giggled reminiscently.

"Well?" queried Barr breathlessly, "What's that got to do with——"

"Shut up. Naturally I asked him if he'd look me up in October, Delighted. Booked 15th to 22d then and there. *Then* I said how run down you looked. He quite agreed. I suggested sea voyage. He thought it just the thing. Should mention it to the Board. Might tell my friend. *So* pleased to have met me. Au revoir."

Barr leaped to his feet and fairly yelled. "What! I'm to have a month without having to go. Did he promise? Billy, if it's so you're a cherub."

"Two months," quoth Billy stolidly. "Told him there was no good in half measures. He thought the same. Fane's to take it on."

Barr smote his friend upon the shoulder and danced to the window and back to the fireplace in three skips.

"Billy," he bawled, "you're the original Samaritan re-incarnated. In another month I verily believe I should have fallen by the wayside. And now—now—" the speaker found no words to explain his rapture.

"That's all right, old man, that's all right," said the stout benefactor. "Within a couple of weeks you'll be deathly sick and cursing me by all your gods. But it'll do you a power of good—the sickness, I mean, not the cursing. Now just walk me round the old charnel-house again, for old sake's sake. I should like to sniff the carbolic once more."

They wandered up the broad stairway together and into the long wards, the sights and sounds and smells sinking into the soul of Barr's companion with a familiarity that rolled back as a curtain the last two magnificent years. He was no longer the county magnate, the yacht owner, the proprietor of a string of Newmarket cracks. He was

just plain Billy Desmond again, and the white faces that stared from above the edges of the blue check coverlets roused in him a professional instinct and—believe it as you may—a professional pity that left no room for other and more prosperous emotions.

He stopped and looked curiously at a diet card or two and patted a child's thin hand that was picking idly at the bed cover.

"Anything out of the common, old chap?" he queried.

"N–no," said Barr cautiously. "Rather curious tracheotomy, that. Child here for common fracture of the leg. She was playing with a tin soldier the mother brought and swallowed it. We had to pierce the trachea in a hurry to prevent choking. That's a rummy case over in the corner too. It's a beggar picked up insensible Wapping way. When he came to he could only say one word—or rather make one sound. Sir William made it out to be a form of aphasia—splinter pressing on the brain. He operated. Quite right; splinter was there. He

makes any amount of sounds now, but the worst of it is, we can't understand one of 'em."

They were standing opposite a cot in which a white-faced, bearded man threshed wearily at the blankets and chattered to himself in a torrent of hoarse, guttural words. He gazed eagerly at the pair as they approached, and the storm of soliloquy rose higher. He sat up and addressed them, gesticulating violently.

Suddenly Desmond stayed himself and stopped short at the bed foot.

"Great Heavens!" he declared, "the chap's talking Finnish."

"Finnish!" quoth Barr with an indulgent smile. "What on earth d'you know of Finnish, Billy?"

"Not much, old man. But I've been up the Baltic for three months out of each year for the last two, so I know something. As far as I can make out, he's jawing infernal nonsense, but that it's the nonsense of Finland, I'm prepared to bet my hat."

He turned to the bed and said a few hesitating words. A light leaped to the hopeless weary eyes and the lips left their aimless motion, gaping wide in astonishment.

Then a yell resounded through the quiet of the ward, the patient sprang incontinently from his bed, and flung his arms round Desmond's neck. Before the latter could repel this outrageous assault, two bearded lips had pressed a passionate salute upon his forehead. Then with triumphant gesticulation the storm of words roared on.

The ward was morally and physically paralyzed. Doctor, nurses, and patients stared upon this astounding rupture of the decorum of the room, entirely unable to voice their emotions. The mouthed babblings of the Finn smote upon a silence born of stupefaction.

Desmond laughed gleefully.

"Well, old chap, how's that? 'Hout,' I think. Bring him somewhere for me to talk to him comfortably. He's simply wild with excitement and delight at finding a John-

nie who understands him. It won't do for me to collogue with him here. It would upset the ward."

"If you're quite sure that he's not a dangerous lunatic—" began Barr.

"That's right enough," interrupted Desmond, turning towards the door, "you send him along to me, and I'll find out all about him. He's as sane as you or I now. Send him along."

Barr shrugged his shoulders and made no further opposition. At his order two attendants came forward and helped the man into the regulation slop-suit of the convalescent. Supporting him, they followed Desmond down to the house-surgeon's private room. There they left him pouring out words and yet more words at his new-found friend. One of the attendants thrust his tongue into his cheek as he retired into the passage. He winked towards his companion and tapped his forehead significantly.

"You're right," said the other. "Both of 'em, I should say." Then they passed back to routine grinning.

Barr went on through the wards, and an hour had gone by before he finished his rounds. When he returned to his room again, the patient was still talking, talking; but the first passionate outburst had subsided into a slow, ceaseless stream of monologue. Desmond, his elbows leant upon the table, was staring across at him. His eyes were alight with an interest that his usual stout complacency utterly failed to conceal.

"My goodness, Arthur!" he called, as Barr entered. "Come here and pinch me, old chap. Either I'm dreaming the worst sort of nightmare or else we've got a chance before us that doesn't happen to a man twice in a lifetime. Such things as I've heard."

Barr sniffed. "You must recollect, Billy, that the beggar's only half-witted at present. Aphasia's a rummy thing. Probably he's just remembering something that he's dreamed or what not, and thinks it's a reality. What's he been trying to tell you?"

"You shall hear afterwards, old man.

For the present, get this beggar into a private ward and the best of attendance. I'll stand the shot. I want him to buck up and get well—and as quick as possible, too."

Barr did not look enthusiastic. "He's been getting everything he wants so far," he said stiffly. "We don't illtreat them, as a rule, even in the public wards."

Desmond chuckled joyously. "There, there, my son, don't be shirty. You forget I know the secrets of the slaughter-house as well as you. I know he's had the best of everything, but he hasn't the quiet he needs, or rather that I shall need, for I'm coming to see him every day. Next week he sails with you and me for Uleaborg, and very likely for one or two other places that you've never heard of. So don't you be a hedgehog, but do as I tell you."

Barr stared at him in deepest astonishment, "Good Lord!" he burst out. "You're going to take this Yiddisher on your yacht! Heavens above, Billy, you're as demented as he is!"

"Now, my good Arthur," answered Desmond solemnly, "don't you think I may know my own business as well as you do? Get this man comfortably into a private ward, and then—but not before—you shall hear all there is to hear. What's the good of arguing about things you don't understand in the least."

Barr shrugged his shoulders and dropped further discussion. In silence he touched the bell. Back came the two attendants and received their further orders. Desmond added a guttural word or two to the patient and all three retired stairward. The Finn continued to wave his hand excitedly towards his benefactor as he withdrew upwards, and the flow of his grateful words died slowly into the emptiness of the passages. A door shut in the distance. The last echoes of his chattering were still.

Then Barr turned again to his friend. "Now, perhaps," said he, "you'll be kind enough to explain yourself. What has this hopeless imbecile been stuffing you with?"

The other looked at him with an air of compassion. He nipped the end of his cigar and spat a shred of leaf into the grate before he answered, settling himself comfortably into the recesses of his armchair.

"What a rum old, fat-headed, narrow minded cuss you are, Arthur," he began cheerfully. "Ever been out of England yet? No, now I come to think of it, you never have. Well, we'll right all that presently. However, here goes for the romance, if you like to think it so. I swear to you it's gospel truth. I feel it in my bones. The chap couldn't have possibly imagined the thing, besides, I've heard myself—but that's neither here nor there."

Barr shoved forward the other easy chair and reached for a cigarette. "Well, I'll hear you," he said, "but draw it mild, if it's particularly sensational. The practice of medicine doesn't induce a high level of receptivity for the marvellous. Trot out your lie. I'll reserve judgment till afterwards."

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE TALE OUT OF THE NORTH.

DESMOND looked at his friend for a moment without speaking, puffing great clouds of smoke as he sought a clothing of suitable words for his revelation. Then, as the marvels of it swelled in his memory, he dashed into it incontinent, forbearing oratory.

"By Gum, Arthur, it *is* a rummy game. The fellow's name's Lars—Lars Pladja. What d'you think of that? Picturesque and pretty original in East London, eh? He comes from Skelligen, a village in the district—hanged if I remember the district, but it's somewhere in Northwest Finland and on the seaboard. There'll be time enough to find out the geographical details. Shortly, his story is this:

"He's a woodman, or rather *was* when

he was at home. He was employed on the estate of a magnate of sorts. I've forgotten his name too, but it doesn't signify. At any rate, his employer got into some mess with the Government and doesn't inhabit his ancestral halls. The Government runs the concern on confiscation principles in the old chap's absence.

"This man Pladja spends his time in the forests. Goes for days together among the pines and doesn't see a soul. How he's got to England he has only the ghostliest notion of. Thinks when he was imbecile——"

"Oh, he knows he's been dotty, then," interrupted Barr. "That's a fairly healthy sign at least."

"He knows right enough, but he's as sane as you or I now. Well, he thinks when he was in that state, that he wandered on board some ship in Uleaborg stowed away, and got fired out in the port of London. He has some sort of misty reminiscence of being knocked about by a cross-eyed

scoundrel on board, but can't remember much. He's got here somehow, that's the main point."

"That certainly seems the main point up to now," agreed Barr.

"Don't interrupt. Now enters the villain of the piece. It seems he married his wife in the face of strong opposition from her people—levanted with her, in fact. Her brother—who seems to have been a particularly atrocious sort of scoundrel—never forgave him. The young woman was fair to look upon, and this deadly brute had hoped to make a bit by offering her to the highest bidder."

"There seems sound commercial tact in that," quoth Barr, "but I speak as a fool on feminine subjects."

"You do. Dry up. Our friend queered this pitch entirely, and his poisonous snake of a brother-in-law never forgave him Nothing happened for a time, but the other was on the watch. Now we insert the blue lights for the semi-miraculous touch.

"One day Pladja was eating his grub beside a forest brook—or rather channel, for it was a drought summer—when in one of the pools he sees a metal rod sticking up among the pebbles and sand."

Barr stretched out his legs and guffawed.

"Bless your heart, Billy, the beggar's prigged it out of the Arabian nights. How much for this priceless information?"

"Nothing, you ass. Besides, the beggar can't read. Shut up and let me finish. He sees, as I say, a metal rod, and pulls at it."

"Man is naturally a prehensile animal," explained Barr. "His instincts would not permit him to do less."

"Pulls at it," continued Desmond, paying no attention to this sarcasm, "and up it comes. He finds it's soft metal and of a dull color, but in pulling at it, the bends and cracks upon it showed bright. In point of fact, it's gold."

"What else?" queried Barr softly. "I could have sworn it."

"At this," went on Desmond excitedly, "he paddled into the water and began to dig and delve for all he was worth. In a minute or two up came a cup, and a little later a necklace. Then, as luck would have it, a cloud-burst and a thunderstorm came on, down came a deluge, and before he knew what was what the torrent was roaring away ten feet deep."

"The laws of nature are imperious," said Barr. "Water must find its level."

"Well, that didn't put him out at all, because he knew that he could return when the spate was over and scoop in the remainder. He buried the cup and necklace not wishing to excite suspicion by bursting too much treasure on the community all at once, but the sceptre —for that's what it undoubtedly was by his description—he cut up into little bits and took it home. He sold it lump by lump to an old Jew money-lender, and this old fool let the cat out of the bag."

"I've known a Jew or two myself," said Barr, parenthetically.

"So it came to the brother-in-law's ears that his sister's husband had got something worth selling. He came down like a cart-load of brick. He demanded his share and our friend very naturally told him to go to the devil. Then this stupendous villain began his tricks."

"It's Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Billy," said Barr stolidly. "You can't get away from it."

"Humbug! This was the way of it. The fellow in charge of the Skelligen estates was apparently just such another brute. He was a relation of the former owner, as far as I can make out. As he was by no means a *persona grata* to the intelligent peasantry, he had a lieutenant and a couple of dozen soldiers to look after him. These two beauties went to the officer and fudged up some sort of charge against the unfortunate Lars and got him shoved into jail. What they did to him there, Lord only knows; but some utter devilishness, for there seems no doubt it was there he went off his head."

"Humph!" said Barr, unbelievingly, "the question is, was he ever on it?"

"He can't give any detailed account of the matter. All he remembers is that his wife was mixed up in it. It was on seeing her in their hands that something cracked inside him—as he describes it—and he was endowed with the strength of ten. Somehow or other he must have hewed his way out, for the next thing he remembers he and his wife were outside in the forest. After a bit his wife couldn't move any more. He realizes now that she must have died then, but he says he didn't at the time. Directly after that he was alone and tearing through the forest. He must have visited and unearthed his buried treasure in some sort of instinctive way, just as a dog scratches up its bones: for when he was on the ship he found the necklet round his neck."

"Query: Is it the same necklet?" quoth Barr. "Where is it, my most credulous young friend?"

Desmond thrust his hand into his pocket

and flung a string of amber beads upon the table. "There you are, my unbelieving Thomas. Now let me go on," and he resumed his tale, as Barr examined the gold-linked circlet.

"He thinks there were a lot of wolves in the forest, and that he played with them, and laughed to them from the tree tops, but that may well be a bit of imagination, as you suggest. But that doesn't matter as far as the rest of the story's concerned."

"Hang it, Billy," remonstrated Barr, "don't jib at a wolf or two after swallowing a buried hoard! Let's have the wolves by all means. Most effective touch."

"All right. Grin, if you like. You won't put me off it. Now he's in the wildest sort of state at finding I understand him, and he's begged me, by all I hold sacred, to take him back to his home and give him a chance to see his desire upon his enemies. I told him he was a fool for his pains to wander back to a place where, as sure as eggs are eggs, he'll only be clapped in prison again,

and probably a worse thing than before come upon him. But it's no use. It wasn't at first, by any means, that he let on about this,—only as a means of bribing me to take him along. He'd spent himself first in explaining his tale of woe without any allusion to this treasure trove. Now, seriously, what d'you think?"

"I think very seriously indeed," answered Barr, "for I perceive that you and he are lunatics who differ only in degree. Probably in some of his sailor wanderings he picked up this old necklace somehow—perhaps honestly, perhaps not—and evolved the remainder out of a whisky or vodki-heated imagination. But I know you well enough to be perfectly aware that what you call your mind is already made up, and that you mean sailing up to Skeleton—or whatever the outlandish place may be—to dust after this fantastic phantom of a lunatic's brain. So be it. It'll be a jaunt, anyway. I shall, perhaps, prevent you getting into the most disastrous kind of scrape, so I'll come. But,

oh Lor', the blatant absurdity of the business?"

"Well, there you're talking wild, old man," said Desmond, getting up and straddling across the hearthrug. "This isn't the first time by many that I've heard of Viking treasure being buried up North. If you come to think of it, and consider how those old customers were always raiding South, it's a rum thing that more of the stuff hasn't come down the centuries. In my opinion, there's more of it buried by a lot than's ever been found."

"That, I should think, is excessively probable," said Barr dryly, "so why go paddling after it in a mountain torrent. Much better form a syndicate of exploration and discovery and send other fools. The Russian Government will let you have a concession of all Finland, probably, for a couple of fivers. What on earth should bring sceptres and necklets into the bed of a stream?"

"That's the convincing thing about it," said Desmond. "If the beggar had only

come with a tale of buried treasure, I might have thought with you. But, my boy, it isn't likely he would imagine the stream incident; it's a trifle too improbable, unless you consider other testimony. It's just here that history backs him up. It's well-known that the old Vikings used to bury their special chiefs by turning aside the course of a stream, putting the corpse in a hole in the bed of it, and then turning on the tap again. What they did for their chiefs, you may bet a very considerable part of your income, they did for their worldly goods. Gold's more valuable than even heroic carrion. Anyway, I'm going to have a look—see, and you're coming along to call fair. Placetne Domini? or must I use force?"

Barr yawned aggressively and looked upon his friend with contemptuous pity. "You always were an enthusiastically dogged ass, Billy," he began, "and I s'pose you always will be, till you get a good fall. Yes, I'm coming. But if you think——"

Desmond caught him by the elbow and twisted him out of his chair. "There, Arthur, that's quite enough. That'll suffice to relieve your conscience. Come along with me to the club, and then we'll see what sport the town affords. If you preached till doomsday you wouldn't turn me, so drop it."

He reached his hand over to a peg, lifted down a hat, and dumped it on the other's head. Thrusting him and his expostulations before him, he drove him from the room. The sound of the wordy warfare grew thinner down the passages; the great doors of the hospital swung to. Their altercations finally lost themselves in the swirl of the London traffic. Thus was the Foray conceived and begun.

CHAPTER III.

CONTRABAND OF WAR.

A GLASSY sheen lay upon the face of the waters, dimmed and shivered now and again by the little catspaws off the land. The white wings of the "Hendrik Hudson" were spread, but as often as not flapped idly against the mast when the breeze died, rose, and died again. Over the narrows of the Sound lay a haze, simmering in the April sun. The white cottages of Vaedbek and other 'longshore villages nestled into the green of the beech woods, showing spotlessly against the glare. It was a perfect day in a perfect Scandinavian Spring.

Barr rolled, stretched himself, and then sank luxuriously back into his lair among the cushions. His face expressed a beatitude of content. His cigar smoke encircled

him like a luscious halo. His yawn concentrated into its expansiveness the languorous delights of seven days of uninterrupted idleness. He blinked upon the Danish shores with a placid sense of proprietorship in their beauties as by right of discovery. He was soaked and surfeited in a warm bath of sea-breeze and sunshine. His blood ran within him as wine.

To him entered Desmond from the companionway. A business-like air and the importance of command lay thick upon him He bawled his orders with no uncertain sound, and the whirr of the wheel spokes followed swift upon the words. Before a sudden gust the prow crept round to starboard. The yacht began to nose inland to where Copenhagen showed, dim in the mantle of the heat haze, girt with the forest of her shipping.

Barr raised his eyebrows. "Going in, old man?" he queried.

Desmond nodded. "Yes; going to call for an hour."

"You said you shouldn't stop short of Uleaborg. Why this waywardness?"

Desmond shrugged his shoulders. "There were all these rumors of war before we came out. Best to hear what's happened, if I can. I couldn't make out what those men meant that we hailed just now. Something about Russia. If we're going to shove our head into the Bear's jaws, we may as well know how we stand."

Barr groaned loudly. "If that isn't my luck exactly. Here am I on my first real holiday for two years, and then the blighted Emperor of Russia must step in to spoil the whole show. I should have thought my little egg-basket might have been spilt without plunging the nations into war. But no; my luck is the kind that impresses itself upon you with stupendous and carefully thought out cataclysms. With any ordinary folk it would have been measles, or a broken arm, or at most, a shipwreck. With *me* it's either drop the whole business or a probable five years of a Russian fortress, or

mayhap, a bullet. Well, well; man's born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. I'm sorry my eternal destiny has dragged you into its baneful orbit, Billy."

Desmond laughed and filled his pipe. "All's experience, my boy, even the inside of a Russian prison. Not that I think it'll come to that. We needn't make our moan till we hear more certainly. Curl yourself up again and snore peacefully. I'll waken you when we clear for action."

They drifted slowly along, the two-knot zephyr fanning irregularly upon their canvas, and passed into the channel that runs between the island and the blunt spit of land upon which the Danish Capital stands. As the chain rattled in the hawse-pipe the dingy. took the water and Desmond was set ashore. Barr returned happily to his slumbers.

Two hours later he was awakened by the sound of his friend's voice, and by the din of the anchor coming home. He was aware, as he blinkingly surveyed his surroundings, that the yacht was under weigh again, and

was creeping out of harbor. She was heading for the Swedish coast. Desmond had returned to his chair and to his eternal pipe, which he was methodically stuffing with birdseye. The grin that usually lurked on his ingenuous countenance was lacking. He seemed to be considering something with absolute seriousness and concern. This phenomenon was so entirely foreign to his temperament and customs that Barr sat up to regard him with anxiety.

"How now, Billy?" he questioned. "For goodness sake, what's up?"

Desmond blew a cloud at him. "Nothing at present. Everything, probably, in the near future. Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, and Napoleon, Emperor of the French, have conjointly espoused the cause of Turkey. They have notified Nicholas the Russian that he is to quit pounding the sons of Islam. Most unjustifiably and unaccountably they have failed to consult me. A rumpus must needs ensue. The question is—What about us and our little game?"

"Is war an absolute certainty?"

"Nothing's a certainty, my boy. But the odds are a thousand to one on. Nicholas is not the man to take that sort of thing sitting down."

Barr shrugged his shoulders. "How can I say, old man? I risk nothing but my very inconsiderable self. You risk your ship and crew. Certainly, it's for you to decide."

"They seem to think our fleet's coming up here too," mused Desmond. "It would be ripping to see the turn up. Besides, why should an absurd rumor put us from our purpose? Anyway, we've got to decide within ten minutes. When we're opposite Malmo we must either swing port for home or starboard for the Baltic. Now which is it to be?"

"I'm yours to command in peace or war," said Barr. "I don't mind owning that from a strictly personal point of view, I'm for continuing. The joy and mystery of the quest were just beginning to filter into my vitals. But as I said before, I have no responsibil-

ity to brake my opinion; it runs unweighted. Do just what you think best."

Desmond puckered his brows. "I'm hanged if I know what to do. I want to go on, of course, and so do you. But the question is, are we justified in risking crew and ship?"

"If our fleet's to come up here, these waters will be as safe for us in a week or two as the English Channel; the Russ hasn't a tiniest chance of sticking up to them. But why don't you consult Jones and one or two of the crew? Of course Pladja will want to go on all the more,—he'll see chances of endless gore and revenge upon the oppressor, but our own men ought to have a say in the matter."

The amateur commanding officer flamed out in Desmond in a moment. "Nonsense," he snapped. "It's an end of all discipline if you cry to your naval wet-nurse every time you want to make a decision. I have it. We'll toss for it." He produced a florin from the depths of his trouser pocket. "You

call," he said tersely to Barr, and the coin twinkled high into the air. It fell on the spotless decks and rolled in slow circles toward the scuppers. The fate of the foray hung upon a single word.

"Heads," called Barr, and they both sprang from their chairs and rushed to where the small silver disc glittered in the sun. The graven similitude of England's Queen stared up at them. Then, as Desmond slapped it home again into his pocket, for some reason of instinct rather than of intention, the two men grasped each other's hand. They were no longer merely the pals of a yachting expedition, but captain and lieutenant respectively of a buccaneering foray. At least so went the trend of their inmost souls.

Barr broke the silence. "Well, that's a weight off my mind," said he. "Oh, I was in a horrid funk it would be against us. My stars! how ripping and mediæval I feel. Where's our skull and cross bones? Why wasn't I christened Drake or at least Haw-

kins? 'To singe the Emperor of Russia's beard,' don't you know, or words to that effect. See the headlines in the papers, old boy; 'First blood to Britain. Daring raid by private yacht. The sea-dogs of England loose again.' Eh, old man? Does that make your sluggish pulses stir?"

Desmond had recovered his everlasting smile, but he grunted deprecatingly before he replied.

"Umph!" said he, "it's much more likely to be,' Destruction of private yacht in the Baltic. Capture of the crew. All the prisoners sent to the salt mines.' However, we've decided, so that's the end of it. We aren't at all necessarily going to encounter a Russian man-of-war. They'll be snug inside Cronstadt if they hear a whisper of our fleet coming up. There are no Turkish vessels up this way, so we can't be mixed up in any business till war is actually declared. It's when we get North that there may be trouble. That we'll leave considering till we meet it."

"It'll all depend if war's declared when we get to Skelligen," began Barr. "Of course if it is, and we're discovered, that's the end of it. We can't very well——"

"Can't, can't?" exploded Desmond. "D'you suppose I'm a perfect fool. There are shotguns and rifles aboard enough to arm the crew. I'd like to see a rabble of Finland serfs stick between our men and what they want if we mean business. I mean going through with this, I can tell you."

"But, Good Lord, Billy, you can't stand up to a regiment. Supposing there are soldiers about?"

"Time enough to suppose that when we get there. Now let's drop raising the ghost of every unpleasant eventuality that *could* happen and enjoy ourselves while we may," and as Desmond gave vent to this very proper and inspiring sentiment, Menzies, the Scotch steward, announced luncheon. Leaving, therefore, forbodings for the practicalities of victual, they descended saloonward with appetites in no degree impaired

by the momentous issues they had been called on to decide.

When they got on deck an hour later, the wind had freshened. The waves were tipped with white, and the yacht was no longer sidling slowly before the breeze, but flying nine knots an hour past the point of Falsterbo. Her prow at last was heading North into the wide expanse of the Baltic.

As the day died down into the sunset the gale freshened, and night found them steering up into the great sea-gulf under nearly bare poles, the surges thundering astern and sweeping them along a good fifteen miles an hour.

So on through the night they fled and stayed not. With the coming of the dawn the wind began to drop, though still fresh, and they considered their dead reckoning, for they had held far to eastward for sea room and land was entirely out of sight.

Jones calculated their position to be about

forty miles South of the island of Gottland. They had to decide whether to pass it East or West. East was no doubt shorter, and in tempestuous weather safer. On the other hand, it brought them nearer the Russian coast and within reach of Russian cruisers.

Jones, the sailing-master, thought fit to put in a judicious word. "In *case* of trouble, sir, inside Gottland would be most convenient-like."

That decided it. Desmond rounded on him with all the exasperation born of good and unwelcome advice.

"In *case* of trouble, Mr. Jones. Great Heavens! What trouble?"

"Well, sir, they say——"

"Who say? and what?"

"Well, sir, it was hinted by a man on the quay-side at Copenhagen to Murphy, the coxswain, there, that war was imminent."

"War imminent," stormed Desmond. "War's going on. We're not a Turkish gunboat, but an English yacht."

"No sir, but they say that England and France——"

"Thank you, Mr. Jones. If we're to run this cruise according to the fat-headed imaginations of every dock-side loafer who airs his second-hand opinions, I'll let you know. At present, when I want advice I'll ask for it. Outside passage, please, Mr. Jones, and stand well out to eastward," delivering which command, with great show of imperious discipline, Desmond returned along the deck to his companion. He had a good deal of the air of a cochin china who has had his feathers ruffled by an absurd disagreement with a bantam.

Thus again was the fate of the foray decided by a triviality—this time simply the officiousness of a well-meaning and perfectly well-advised old seaman.

All that day they swung along, meeting only a couple of merchantmen under Swedish colors, and as they drew nearer the Gottland coast, a country boat or two. The early dark was just beginning to fall as they

sighted two vessels to starboard, one much nearer than the other, and both making at them from the East as if to slant across their bows and on to the Swedish coast.

As they drew near the first one, the yacht showed English colors. In answer the stars and stripes crept up the stranger's flag halliards, and to the English hail came the reply——

"Jemima of New London. Bremen to Stockholm. Russian gunboat astern. Think war is declared with England. We have contraband."

Jones slapped his leg and snorted triumphantly. "That *is* the trouble I spoke of, sir."

"Well, Mr. Jones," snapped the exasperated Desmond. "What if it is? D'you think I'm to be stopped by a twopenny-halfpenny Russian gunboat? If war *is* declared, I shall stop and take her."

"Excuse me, sir," said the skipper with dignity. "You hold no commission to levy war. Neither I nor the men signed as combatant."

It is impossible to say what reply Mr. Jones' pusillanimity would have evolved. Desmond's mouth was agape with winged words, which in another moment would have been flitting sulphurously round the skipper's head. At that moment a rending crash pealed across the waters from the other ship. He wheeled about and looked towards her and saw that disaster had befallen. Her deck was littered with splinters, cordage, and flapping canvas. Her foretopmast had given under the press of sail. She lay a prey to the Russian as easily as a shot wild duck to a retriever.

Desmond swore aloud. "Well, my fine fellow, you've got to fight now. Bring us alongside and let's hear the rights of the case."

Jones spread out his hands and began to stammer, "I must protest——"

Desmond rounded on him like a flash. "May I remind you that I have a Board of Trade certificate and am master of this vessel. By Gum, if you don't bring us alongside in two shakes of a dog's tail, I'll

have you in irons for mutiny, you lily-livered cock."

They slid up to within threescore fathoms of the other vessel. Mr. Jones' expressions were varied and peculiar and his glances astern numerous. But Desmond was a very vivid actuality of unpleasantness beside him, while the Russian only loomed distantly astern. He gave in with a bad grace, it must be owned, but with a well-considered weighing of the chances of immediate discomfort.

"Can we help?" bawled Desmond as they bobbed about. "Shall I send aboard?"

A redbearded, blue-eyed skipper came to the side and shouted back with melancholy gratitude: "Thanks many, Mister. Too late, I'm afraid. She'll be on us in quarter of an hour. She sailed fathom for fathom with us before. We can't get repaired in time. But don't you get mixed up in our dust. Cut your lucky and show your heels."

"Let me take you off?" suggested Desmond.

The other flushed a fine color and spat contemptuously into the sea. "Not by no manner of means," he replied. "She's only a despatch boat. Only one gun, not much better than a signaller. Let her board and chance it. We've got forty cases rifles and thirty tons powder, so I shall let for her. We've a couple of passengers, though—" he scratched his head, "but that's no good either. They'd see them and chase you and come back to us. I reckon they want them as much as the other. I'm going to let for her, but don't you get into trouble."

Desmond squealed for joy. "If you're going in to win, I'll be entirely blighted if I don't stand by. I've got a signaller. Let me put six pounds of lead into her forefoot and surprise her weak nerves. She'll throw up the game if she sees we mean business."

"You ain't got a letter of marque, you see," said the merchant skipper, scratching his head for the second time, "and you don't know for certain that war's declared. You'll have to let her start, and then you

can defend. But don't come no privateering tricks," and he returned to urging on his crew to their exertions with the deck litter, using a wealth of most pointed invective.

Desmond massed his men aft and, quelling intervention on the part of Jones with a fiery glance, addressed them in patriot wise. He put the case before them with bluntness. Here was a good civilized American ship at the mercy of a score of half-tamed Tartars. Were they to leave her to be taken and her crew to rot in Russian prisons? Were they to become the talk of every dockside from the Tyne to the Liffey as the white-hearted lot who saw friends being pounded and sneaked out of the row? No; perish the thought! He'd arms aboard, and all would do their duty as English seamen. Mr. Menzies would supply applicants with a glass of grog all round. Then they'd stand by to whip any and all the interfering Russians ever whelped.

A wild cheer rose as he concluded, and a simultaneous rush was made to the stew-

ard's quarters, where toasts of victory received full acknowledgment.

Then the little brass six-pounder that had hitherto acted as ornament alone, save on foggy nights, was uncovered, sponged out, and loaded. Rifles and shotguns were handed round, and below, the dead-lights screwed in. With an air of impudent unconcern the little yacht bobbed about within a hundred yards of her consort, waiting what should betide.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. JONES FINDS HIS COURAGE.

THE Russian, with the hated yellow at the main, came along with a swing before the favoring breeze. Her sails bellied out prosperously; her cutwater spurned the spray. She leaped the billows with a proud and superior air: to her commander opposition was a thing unthinkable. A puff of smoke burst from her bow. A column of spray followed quickly, rising fifty feet ahead of the merchantman's bow. The Union Jack seemed to flick contemptuously from the yacht's stern as the foam died down among the waves.

The Russian sped along her course, and from her captain's speaking-trumpet came a hail. Over went the yards and the helm was put about. She rounded to within a hundred fathoms.

"Give to me your sheep, or I sink you," came the challenge across the sea-lane. The pronunciation was poor, but the meaning unmistakable.

The Yankee answer went back swift and straight. "See you swimmin' first," defied the skipper, and a mighty cheer rose from the English decks.

Forthwith followed another puff of smoke. This time the ball ploughed the deck of the disabled craft and took a corner of the deckhouse into the sea. The flying splinters smote down a man. Blood showed duskily upon the white decks, visible enough to the watching crew of the yacht. Jones gripped the taffrail in front of him, using wicked words. Barr and Desmond swore aloud. A murmur rustled inarticulately among the men.

Again the six-pounder roared. The answering thud, as it passed clean through an American seaman's body, was sickeningly audible. The shot sped on and crashed into the bulwarks of the yacht. A twisted bit

of rail just flicked Jones' calf. With a howl of rage and a flaming countenance he turned to Desmond.

"Are we to suck our thumbs while she spits on us?" he roared. "Blast their yellow faces, aren't we to defend ourselves? We've been assaulted on the high seas. Ain't that good enough? God bless me, can't I throw a pill aboard her, sir?"

Desmond laughed joyously. "I thought you'd come to see it in that light, skipper," he replied. "Let for her, my boy; give her two for her every one. We'll show her what's what," and he helped whirl round the little carronade with his own hands.

The indignant Jones bent to the sights and dwelt upon them with the lanyard taut. The yacht dipped with the slow swell, and he waited till the rise should give him aim. As the upward heave came, he tugged the cord smartly; away roared the ball, and — oh, joy!—slap into the enemy's hull. A delightful white splintering showed up against her pitched planks.

A rare English cheer rang out upon the sea, but the merchant-skipper shook his head doubtfully across at Desmond, though he could but smile approval of this distinguished marksmanship.

As the Russian recognized that she had a second assailant she began to alter her position. She slewed her one gun and pointed it at the yacht's bow, where it projected beyond the larger vessel. The shot, however, missed, passing over her as she dipped between the waves.

As the gun was run back the Russian began to get weigh again. She began to turn and circle towards her adversary. There was no doubt about it, she meant boarding.

There was a snapping of clasps aboard the yacht as the seamen got out their knives; the capstan bars were collected, and belaying pins laid handy; every rifle and shotgun was loaded. Then in a breathless silence the crew waited, watching the approaching vessel.

Desmond followed every movement on her

deck as she neared them. His gaze was concentrated on the winking brass gun at her bow. Suddenly he gave a shout.

"Down behind the bulwarks, every man jack of you," he bawled. "She's loaded canister. When she touches off, up and give back all you've got."

She was circling to them now a bare hundred yards away. The foam ran up her stem and shot into the air against her bilge as she heeled. They could note the rainbow rays as the sun glanced upon it.

Fifty yards now—and they could see the expectant faces of the sailors and the eyes of the gunner turned upon his commander. There was a pause, while all held their breath. Then quickly the officer nodded and Desmond ducked. The canister hailed down upon the planks, carrying destruction to the deckhouse and skylight, but never a man was touched, though splinters flew wide and white.

As the crash died away, the sailors leaped to their feet. With a yell they greeted the

clash of the meeting bulwarks and a volley clanged at close quarters into the ranged lines of man-of-war's men. A dozen of them rolled upon the decks in sudden helplessness.

With answering yells the Russian boarders broke across their lashed hammocks and swarmed upon the British deck.

Then ensued a scrimmage grim and great. Jones—erstwhile coward—now ramped the bloody planks a very lion of war. Whirling a capstan bar, he advanced upon the attacking party and with a single blow smote upon the lieutenant's head, cracking it like an eggshell. Still brandishing his weapon, he sprang in among the following blue-jackets, dealing death and destruction, while hot upon his track followed Barr and Desmond. With muskets clubbed and eyes and knives agleam, the crew flung themselves into the fray.

Over the huddle of wrestling, smiting, swearing sailors the powder-smoke hung like a fog, and out of it came cries and thud of fist and club and the grate of rasping bulwarks as the ships tore at their fixed grapnels like

living foes. The combatants lost themselves in a very mist of passion and fighting lust.

Half the Russians were upon the British decks; a score of British held the Russian forecastle. Jones and Desmond, unknowingly raging forward into the bows of the man-of-war, found themselves hewing clear space round the Russian gun. Barr, with half-a-dozen English tars, held their own deck-house from a score of Muscovites. Across the grey haze of smoke a musket-flash showed redly here and there.

Desmond, falling, gripped unseeingly at the lanyard of the carronade, whose gunner had been found by a chance bullet ere he could fire her after reloading. With a resounding crash the charge roared into the bulwarks before her muzzle. With sudden inspiration he seized the lever and started the carriage at a run down the decks. Gathering impetus with the heave of the ship, the gun smote upon the shattered planking and leaped into the sea. A yell of delight rang out from the British crew as they

saw the drawing of their enemy's single tooth.

From the yacht's hatchway answered another echoing shout. Out of the companion sprang Pladja, the Finn, bearded, wild-eyed, wondering, upon the sudden turmoil. For one moment he stared in amaze; then, as the familiar hated uniform caught his eye, with a snarl as of a wolf a-hunt he hurled himself into the fight, roaring, hewing, stabbing like one possessed. The white-faced Russians fell before him like leaves in an autumn gust.

A crash from the far-side proclaimed the gunboat attacked starboard as well as port. With a cheer the Yankees sprang down upon her decks and linked forces with the British. Silently, unseen, they had towed their disabled hulk to the rescue and now swept the Muscovites before them in irresistible league with their comrades of the yacht. Another two minutes' hurly-burly, wherein the snap of pistols and the thudding of clubs contended ceaselessly, and the cowed sailors

of the Czar were driven pell-mell down the hatchways in tumbled heaps and battened down. Then, with shouts of victory, the yellow flag whereon sat the double-headed eagle was hauled down and cast into the sea. Vigorous were the shakings of each Yankee hand and hearty the slaps upon each British back. Upon the quarter-deck the two commanders met and strove to make themselves heard above the congratulatory din.

"Thanks, Mister, a hundred times," said the merchant-skipper soberly, "but the Lord, he only knows what to make of this."

"Make of it!" shouted Desmond, the unstanched blood flowing down his face. "Why, tow her back to England the first prize of the war."

"Mercy me," replied the other sadly, "You're young indeed, Mister, or you wouldn't frame the words. This is piracy of sorts, this is. We're filibusters, we are. No commission to levy war, don't you know."

"Damn the commission," quoth Desmond. "Let's chance it."

"There again, Mister, you show your youth. There might be some chance for you, *if* you've declared war, and that you can't tell yet. But there ain't a morsel for me and mine. Piracy on the high seas, it is, and no error. By all that's reasonable, let her go her evil way, and pray to be forgotten and forgiven. Two good men have I lost and over this most misfortunate affair; you've been let blood too, as your ash decks show only too plainly. Chuck their arms into the sea and send them back to Cronstadt and the devil."

Desmond looked half convinced and unhappy. "Well, skipper," he said unwillingly, "I suppose you know your business best. But how in the name of all that's extraordinary did you come to be carrying contraband in these seas? Is the Turkish fleet coming up?"

"That's a tale as I'll unfold in the cabin," said the American, "leastways, I've them

there as will. Just for the present let's get quit of this here splintered wreck," and he shouted to his crew.

Desmond bawled to his own men. "Fling over those grapnels," he called to the wondering crew, who were already discussing prize averages, and they did as they were bid in a silence of stupefaction.

With empty, silent decks the gunboat slid from between her antagonists, like a big bully out of the grip of two revengeful urchins. Yawing to port masterless and unsteered, she was buffeted by the billows wantonly. As she drifted slowly apart from the other vessels one of her battened hatchways was flung into the air by an unseen force, and a man in military uniform stepped upon her decks.

"Pirates," he shouted to them, and shook his fist. "Pirates; but I not forget, no, I not forget."

Then the ravaged gunboat slipped away into the darkness of the evening mist, which gathered her into its bosom, covering her

wounded decks and bulwarks as with a lint of cloud.

Barr was below, and stretched upon the table of the saloon were three poor fellows with wounds that gaped scarlet — cutlass gashes that drained their life blood hideously. Desmond joined his trained assistance to Barr's skill, and between them they stitched and wiped and bandaged with swiftness wonderful. Half-a-dozen more were slightly scarred by sword or bullet and patiently waited their turn. Upon the other ship's deck, as she rode alongside, could still be seen the crimson remnants of the seaman who had been pulped by the round shot. The scarlet stains were dramatic evidence of the shattering of England's thirty long years of peace.

After the wounded had been got to their berths, Desmond and two or three hale members of the crew transhipped to the "Jemima" to offer assistance with the footing of the new foremast. The skipper, with much politeness, ushered Desmond in-

to his cabin to wet the occasion as naval etiquette demanded.

Two persons rose to greet them as they entered, a tall, grey-moustached military gentleman, and a slight, fair-haired girl.

"My passengers," announced the American with matter of factness. "Let me introduce Colonel and Miss Preobeslas. Mr. —er —Desmond."

Desmond began to be acutely conscious of his general dirt and dishevellment. His clothing was gashed and ragged and his face a resting-place for smuts unnumbered.

Dark stains splashed his jacket here and there. No wonder, then, that he blushed and stammered like a schoolboy as he eyed this wonderful apparition in surroundings so unlikely, for this maiden who bowed and smiled at him with such sweet cordiality was so he swiftly realized, the one peerless woman in the wide world.

CHAPTER V.

PLADJA, THE FINN, EXPLAINS HIMSELF.

IT was the Colonel who broke the silence. He held out his hand with a frank smile, speaking in excellent English.

"We owe you great thanks, sir," he said, "for aid most opportune. But for your assistance I fear we should have been compulsory passengers aboard the gunboat you have so valiantly beaten off, sailing for Cronstadt, which, in my case at any rate, would have meant a very early death. We should have ranked as prisoners, but not of war."

"But why?" stammered Desmond. "Surely the fact of your vessel bearing contraband of war doesn't affect you?"

"Unfortunately," replied the Colonel, "it belongs to me. I see I must explain a little. The fact is, I have had my little

differences with the paternal government of the Czar. I and a few thousand of my fellow countrymen —I have the honor to be a Pole—took upon ourselves to reason with our Russian administrators on a matter of sentiment. We objected to their methods and perhaps were a trifle forcible in our manner of expressing our ideas. In fact, as you probably are aware," continued he, "we killed a few thousand of them a year or two back."

Desmond held out his hand. "If you're one of the Polish patriots, sir, I should like to shake hands with you again. By Jove! I wish we'd sunk those brutes. But how in the world did you come to be pursued? Where did you sail from?"

"From Bremen," said the Colonel, "as I think I heard our friend here inform you."

"Of course; I forgot. But how in the world did a Russian gunboat come to be on your trail from Bremen?"

"I see I must give you the whole story. Besides my Polish property, I have a good

deal of land on the Baltic coast. This has been confiscated by the paternal government aforesaid, together with what I own elsewhere. The creature whom they have installed as their agent is, I much regret to say, my cousin. This vile wretch found out, by some means unknown to me, my presence in Bremen, and notified the Executive. He was, in fact, the gentleman who bade us that dramatic farewell from the gunboat's deck just now. How he got his gunboat timed to meet us in the Baltic, I cannot say. Probably we were watched leaving Bremen harbor. Anyway, there we were, and the result we have seen."

"But the contraband of war. He must have known of that or wouldn't have dared to stop a ship under the stars and stripes."

"That he doubtless heard of from the same source whence he got news of my movements. You must understand," continued the Colonel, smiling, "that the Executive put an exaggerated value on the control of my person and talents. I fear I have

been a sore thorn in their flesh. It was owing to the fact that your British Government had begun to seriously agree with me in my estimate of Russian affairs that I thought the time was ripe to again bring forward my old arguments. The rifles and powder were to have been landed further North—on my own old estates, in fact—and a rising fomented. This was due to the fact that we had information that the countryside was drained of troops for the South. I fear now that further action in the matter has been prevented by this untimely affray."

"Well, I am still more proud and thankful, now I hear the rights of the case, that we got to you in time," said Desmond. "But how can I serve you now?"

"My dear sir, you pile up the obligation. You have already risked life and property for entire strangers. What is, then, left for your kindness to suggest? I heard your offer to take us off before the fight began. It was only because I knew that we should

be seen and pursued that I didn't accept it. Believe me, the Russians would have followed you under the guns of Fort Waxholm rather than let you escape into Stockholm with us on board. You have, indeed, done all there is to do."

"Yes, indeed, you have," chimed in the daughter. "How can we thank you enough?"

As Desmond looked up, he felt that she of all people in the world could find a means. Yet the audacity of the mere thought made him blush and mutter inanities as he strove to find a reply. The soft earnestness of those blue eyes, the sweet gratitude that shone in the deliciously flushed face—these things made his brain whirl with the rapture of regarding them. It seemed impossible that this charming creature could really be considering him when she spoke in this manner.

"Anything I have done has been an honor as well as a pleasure," he stammered, "but don't you think another vessel

may be still in pursuit? If they set such importance on your capture, they will surely try to insure it. If you would only condescend to accept the hospitality of my yacht, I should have the greatest pleasure in conveying you to Stockholm, or wherever you like, as soon as possible. This unfortunate accident to your mast must detain you."

The Colonel spread out his hands deprecatingly. "You are kindness itself," he answered. "I couldn't think of disturbing your cruise—" he began, but Desmond interrupted eagerly. "I was bound for Stockholm in any case," he averred mendaciously, "and if Miss Preobeslas will excuse our bachelor menage [the blue eyes sparkled merrily] I can promise to try at any rate, to make you fairly comfortable."

The Colonel was overwhelmed by this offer, but in truth it could not be accepted. There were the munitions of war. These he could not bring himself to desert.

Desmond was determined. The muni-

tions of war could be transhipped. The Colonel owed it, not only to himself but to his country, to do that which served her best. As a mere matter of principle, he hoped the matter might be reconsidered from this point of view. The Colonel wavered and was profound in his acknowledgments. How could he force himself on such astounding good nature? He appealed to his daughter. She, with graceful, outspread hands, could find no arguments to help him, and could but smile her helplessness. Lane, the skipper, when appealed to, was most evidently agreeable to losing his passengers, having an eye to the dangerous nature of both them and their cargo. Finally, the long and short of it was, that within two hours the Polish refugees were ensconced in the yacht's best cabins and the cases of rifles in her hold. When morning dawned the merchant-vessel was a dwindling speck upon the horizon, and with every sail set the "Hendrik Hudson" was flying north to Stockholm.

Pladja, the Finn, was talking in the little English he had managed to pick up when Desmond and his guests strolled on deck after breakfast. He was addressing Jones excitedly, licking his lips reminiscently over the glories of the fight. A cutlass wound had seared his forehead and was bound with ample folds of lint. In this he resembled more than one of the yacht's crew, but Barr had pronounced them all to be healthy wounds and likely to heal, though some of them were shrewd enough gashes.

As the Colonel's voice was raised in answer to some remark of his host, a strange thing happened. The Finn whirled round and stared at him from beneath his bandaged brows, his eyes ablaze, his mouth open, intense amazement shining in every feature. With a wild cry he rushed across the intervening deck and cast himself at the other's feet, snatching at his hands, covering them with kisses, pouring out a babel of disjointed, tremulous words, fawning like

a dog who has found his master after long days of separation.

For the moment the Colonel was entirely nonplused. Then, as the bearded face was turned up to him, the brown eyes appealing hungrily for recognition, the thin hands catching at his knees, a shout burst from between his lips. Raising the man to his feet, he wrung his hands, smiling, talking, patting his shoulder, while great tears coursed down his cheeks.

"Lars, Lars," he called continually, and the babel of words rioted gladly between them, while the English could only watch and wonder. For an instant Miss Preobeslas regarded her father with uncomprehending amazement. Then, with a glad cry, she too ran to the chattering, hand-grasping pair, and joined in the *mêlée* of happy words. The outcry with which Pladja had greeted her father was a whisper compared to the triumphant yell with which he flung himself upon his knees before the daughter and caught at and kissed her skirts, fon-

dling her extended hand, weeping, gesticulating, raising his hands, and calling on every saint in the Greek calendar to bless this unsought meeting. The Colonel saw the curiosity written large on Desmond's face, for he turned towards him while the war of questions and answers still raged between his daughter and the Finn, and with many smiles gave shortly his explanation of the matter.

"I have hardly yet been able to gather how my old servant and foster brother comes to be on your yacht, my dear sir, but you will understand my delight in finding him here, when I had believed him dead these three years back. He was the forester on my Finnish estate and the most faithful of servants—of comrades, let me say. Word was brought me of his death in a Russian prison some time back. I had indeed thought that he had succumbed to his torments there, rather than betray my whereabouts. I see now it was only a device of the enemy to cause me pain. He

says you are sailing to his very home—to my own estate, in fact—mine, at least, before it was confiscated by the righteous Executive which denies rights of property to those from whom it differs."

"We are certainly sailing for Skelligen," said Desmond, "urged thereto by Pladja himself. He had promised us possession of a treasure which I now perceive belongs to you. How he reconciled it with his conscience to give us knowledge of it, I can't say. Perhaps you'd better ask him."

The Colonel turned to the Finn again, and the talk went on. The expressions of amusement, surprise, and finally indignation that crossed his countenance as his former forester explained himself were varied. Suddenly his genial face shut up hard and rigid. He glared at the Finn; his words grew stern and lashed out at the other, who, cringing and grovelling, turned to the lady for support. Her face was as set as her father's, and she repelled him with a contemptuous gesture. He turned eagerly, imploringly, from one

to the other, pouring out a flood of words, as evidently he strove to find excuse and explanation for some part of his recital. From father and daughter he received only scorn and repulse. Finally, with a despairing countenance, the unfortunate man crept away forward, while the Colonel turned again to Desmond and began gravely to speak.

"While nothing can really excuse the treachery which it is my painful duty to detail to you, let me ask you to bear in mind in extenuation the fervent feudal devotion which Finns—as well as Poles—bear to their overlord. Also I may plead their overmastering patriotism, which allows all methods to be used which advance the cause of their country. Lars has told to me his discovery of the treasure. He has also had the assurance to explain to me that he meant to use you as instruments only in obtaining it. Afterwards he purposed frankly to steal it and bring it to the leaders of my party. The dishonesty of this course of action has simply never occurred to him. His moral horizon is

bounded very narrowly. He firstly regards things as they affect myself and family; secondly, Finland; and thirdly—and solely on my account—Poland. Your interests in the matter were outside consideration as far as he is concerned. I have just tried to whip a little sense of honor into him. But I fear he now only regards me as an unjust and very foolish old man who has not the good of the cause properly at heart. In fact," and the Colonel burst out laughing, "I believe he thinks me as entire an idiot as he ever met. What are we to do with such a creature?"

"Do," cried Desmond. "Tell him that he has a higher sense of honor than I have, for one. I owe you a thousand apologies. It has only just struck me how extraordinary this cool appropriation of search-rights for another's property appears. The possibility of a lord of the soil never occurred to me. We are apt to think of Finland as a waste where buried spoils would belong naturally to the finder. Accept my deepest penitence,

sir, for this barefaced purpose of burglary on your estate. Now I shall have the happiness, I hope, of assisting you to your own."

Preobeslas waved his cigar deprecatingly and smiled. "You forget, my very dear friend, that the treasure in question is the declared property of the Russian Government. They themselves say so and ought to know. Anything on the land which once was mine they pronounce themselves heir to."

"Then it is our manifest duty to get it from them," said Desmond, "and if you will assist with your special knowledge, I can assure you I shall account it an honor to convey it where it will best aid the cause of Poland."

"Ah, there you vanquish me. Anything for Poland, my friend, anything for my poor country. But how do you purpose setting to work?"

"As far as I can make out from Pladja, the stream in question —which I have no

doubt still flows over the treasure—is about five miles inland and the same distance from Skelligen. It is in the heart of the pine forest and near no ordinary pathway. He talks also of a small rock-ringed bay on a deserted part of the coast where we might anchor unseen. My idea was to arrive at evening, obtain the treasure during the night, and be off at dawn. What have you to say?"

"Most excellently devised, but—there is always a but—I have knowledge which complicates the question. My cousin—whom you lately saw—is, as I say, Government bailiff at Skelligen. He was put there to prevent the rural population showing in any substantial manner its regard for myself. My cousin, who has always been my enemy, discovered that the brave villagers were subscribing to my support in secret and forwarding the proceeds abroad. Representations in the proper quarter sent him down to Skelligen to superintend operations to prevent this. He has done so most effectively by taxing the hapless

peasants beyond any chance of raising more than the bare necessaries of existence. At the same time, by watching and spying on my messenger, he doubtless discovered my presence in Bremen, and put the gunboat on my track. Now we shall find him installed again in Skelligen on our arrival."

"But why should he expect us to descend upon him?"

"I think," said the Colonel dryly, "that my cousin is not the man to let himself be surprised for want of a little suspicion. He has seen me in these waters. He may not now think it likely, but still he will prepare for the possibility of a visit. We must be cautious."

"What force can he have? Surely if the villagers are favorable, we may defy capture even if we're discovered."

The Colonel laughed aloud. "If it weren't for the guard with which he has been furnished, he would have been assassinated long ere this. Though most of the regiments have been drawn South, there is

still a squadron of dragoons at Osbrog. No, my dear sir, we must not rely on a want of force to oppose us."

"What are we to do, then?" sighed Desmond. "It's a burning shame to let the stuff waste."

Preobeslas shrugged his shoulders. "I am a fatalist. I believe destiny meets us at the appointed hour — no sooner. I should say go—and leave the result to chance. But I can't urge this point of view upon you. I risk nothing but my worthless life and should have the satisfaction of perishing—if perish I must—on the land of my fathers. To you it is my plain duty to point out the obstacles."

Desmond's face brightened. "Oh, you want to go, then. That settles the question. So do I. It's only a matter of detail how to do it. We can settle that when we've got to Stockholm, sent the wounded to hospital, and landed Miss Preobeslas."

The Colonel looked at his daughter fondly. "Yes, I was forgetting. You

must remain, Hilmar mine, though I puzzle my old wits to think where."

His daughter gazed back at him in blank amazement. "Father! what can you be thinking of? I remain when you go to our dear Skelligen without me! You must be dreaming."

"But, my own, how can I take you into danger and perchance to death?"

The pale face flushed proudly, and the blue eyes glanced with a clear shining into her father's face. "I am your daughter. I claim my right to be at your side." Then, with a burst of sudden entreaty, she continued, "and how could I be left alone, father, darling?"

The Colonel looked at her wistfully and choked a little sigh. "So be it then, dear. We go together, if," he added with a charming smile—"Mr. Desmond can tolerate feminine society on a bachelor's yacht."

Mr. Desmond was so overpowered by his astounding luck in having the prospect of this delightful maiden for a fellow ad-

venturer, that at first words failed him in which to express his satisfaction. He stammered his pleasure lamely enough, but with an earnestness that brought a blush to Miss Hilmar's cheeks. Her father looked for a moment from his daughter to the young man. With a whimsical expression and the barest shrug of the shoulder he turned away and beckoned Pladja back to him. Desmond and Miss Preobeslas strolled forward.

"D'you think you'll be able to put up with our rough ways?" said Desmond. "I'm afraid you hardly know what you're letting yourself in for. Have you all you want in your cabin? We've never had ladies before in this bachelor retreat."

"I've everything I could possibly wish for," said the girl, "and oh, I can't thank you enough for taking us. To see Skelligen again!—the joy of it is more than I can say."

"Is it your home, then? How is it that your father, a Pole, has lived so much in Finland?"

"It's the home of my mother. She was the daughter of Count Waritzin, and my grandmother was a Scotch lady. I have many relatives in Scotland and passed years there when I was small. Didn't you think it strange I should talk English as I do?"

"Perhaps I did in some ways; yet it seems quite right too. You look so delightfully English, you know. One quite expects it."

"The language of compliment can go no further," said the girl, bowing and making a charming little courtesy. "To be told by an Englishman that I resemble the maidens of his heroic race entirely overpowers me. Attempt no further flatteries, Mr. Desmond. I am beyond them now."

"You are, indeed," said the young man, looking wistfully into her smiling eyes; and with that word and the lady's blush the conversation ended. But something else had only just begun.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAMMING OF THE TORRENT.

THE landward breeze was just dying with the set of sun. Far away, outlined against a pale green sky, showed a dark green edging of forest above a shore of rock. The soft lap of the ripple sang against the yacht's cutwater, and she lingered across the calm, the four-knot breeze taking her gently, silently towards the east.

Up in the bows Desmond stood beside Miss Hilmar and watched enviously the light that shone in her eyes as she gazed at the grey dimness of the shore—the shore that for her meant home. If only that gaze had been for him and his.

"Can you recognize anything yet?" he queried. "I suppose we shouldn't in any

case get a glimpse of the house from this direction."

"Oh, no—Lars is taking us well out of view of that. If Cousin Paul saw a ship in this deserted sea, he might get suspicious."

"I thought perhaps you could see some landmark. You looked so earnestly."

"Of course I look and look. It's home there, home. It'll never be that again really; but can't you understand what it is only to gaze at it, after being a wanderer in strange countries all these years."

"All these years," laughed Desmond. "Come now, we're not so old as all that, are we?"

"No, perhaps I exaggerate my sad case," she answered brightly, "but still I should like to have somewhere that I could call home again," and her voice broke with just the suspicion of a sigh.

Desmond looked steadily back into her face, as she turned her eyes to his.

"I don't think you would find much

difficulty in the matter," he said very quietly, but with yearning in his voice.

For one moment she met his gaze with innocent wonder in her face. Then, as his meaning grew into her brain, she blushed furiously. She walked forward without another word and joined her father. It was a pity Desmond walked humbly behind, for there was a shine in her eyes that matched the soft radiance of the evening sheen upon the waters. Colonel Preobeslas was staring at the desolate coast before him, turning now and again to shout directions to Lars, who was at the helm. The yacht took a devious, not to say intricate, course, bespeaking a reefstrewn channel. As the shore grew plainer before them, they saw the point of their desire.

Deeply cleft in the rocky foreshore lay a little bay, ringed with rocks that ran out in circling breakwaters on either side. Within these was a still pool, lapping lazily a sandy beach. There seemed bare entrance-room for a vessel of the yacht's tonnage, and as

they approached, the Colonel's shouts were frequent. Finally, at his request, a boat was dropped astern, and with a crew of six, lay with the oars, at the ready. The yacht seemed to be charging straight upon the rocks. Only the jib was set, and as rocks began to show visibly beneath her keel, even this was dropped. Her way still urged her on and all on board drew their breath.

Then, at a sharp scream from Lars, the wheel whirred round and the rowers astern bent furiously to their oars, hauling at the rope which was passed from them to the ship's stern. With swiftness incredible the yacht turned, slowed, and slipping between the reefs, shot into the still pool, and the anchor went in four fathoms. It was a fine display of steersmanship; there was bare room in the little bay to hold her. Her bow nosed within twenty feet of the shore and her stern of the circling ring of rocks.

With the rattle of the chain the sun died down into the sea and darkness gathered.

No lights were lit save in the saloon, and here the ports were closed. Never a sound disturbed the stillness. All spoke in whispers. When darkness closed in not a soul would have been able to discern the presence of the ship.

Down in the saloon a hasty meal was snatched. Plans were made in low-voiced tones and one of the cases of rifles was opened and the contents distributed. Pistols were served out to all who were of the landing party. This consisted of Colonel Preobeslas, Desmond, Pladja, and six seamen. Besides their rifles they took spades and mattocks. Barr was to remain in charge with Mr. Jones. Hilmar, in spite of earnest pleading, was condemmed to stay aboard also, and was in consequence in a most becoming state of melancholy. As her father finished his preparation, she turned to him with one last appeal, but in this case he was adamant.

"No, my own, no. Here I make a stand. There is no work for girls to-night. Who

knows if we have been seen? We may have to fight. We may be surprised. Who knows what may happen? You wouldn't have your old father's arm made weak by the knowledge that you shared his peril."

"But father, *dearest*, I can use a pistol as well as you can. I'm just as good a shot and twice as strong."

"Hear her!" said the Colonel, turning to the others with a look of comical despair. "Was there ever such a termagant?" Then, changing his voice to one of quiet command, "Seriously, sweetheart, I don't want you to-night. Be patient, and wait our return. Perhaps we shall have good news for you."

She made no further effort but slid silently out of the group and down the passage. Her cabin door shut gently—the desire to slam it was evident—and for an instant there was a silence in the saloon.

"I fear I'm an old fool to have spoilt her so," said the Colonel, "but you must excuse an old man whose one treasure she is. Now,

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gentlemen, if you're ready, I'm at your service."

They went on deck and there joined Pladja and the six sailors. Quietly they dropped one by one into the dingy and shoved her across the twenty feet that divided her from the shore, where they stepped upon the boulders. There was a light crackle of seaweed and grate of pebbles as they crossed the rocks behind the bay. Then they faded utterly into the darkness. A sailor hauled back the line which attached the boat to the stern and looped it upon one of the davits. Then he joined his fellows in the forecastle. Amidship, Jones and the mate kept motionless watch, one seaward, one towards the shore.

The boat lay rubbing and nosing gently against the timbers of the hull, like a puppy nestling to her mother. Then almost imperceptibly the ripples swung her shoreward again; she stretched out to her full tether. The shadow lay black between the companionway and the deckhouse, and through it a figure moved ghost-like on noiseless feet.

Suddenly the dingy, as if endowed with life, turned and made back towards the ship. A white hand leaned through the taffrail and pulled gently but steadily at the painter. As the boat swung under the stern, two little feet were poised above her, feeling carefully for foothold. Then Hilmar slid noiselessly down in the darkness and pushed away from the hull, speeding to the shore with silent impulse. She caught the rocks with outstretched hands before a timber could grate, and crept out upon them. She spurned back the boat as she landed, and without a ripple it glided again to the ship's side and resumed its dull tapping against the planks. Unseen in her dark cloak, Hilmar crept along the reef, gained the sand, and was in her turn swallowed by the darkness. The deck watch, engrossed in other directions, had not caught a vestige of her as she passed.

A mile away in the forest the treasure-seekers were stumbling along. The rotting pine branches crossed their path here, there,

and everywhere, and many were the trips they made, and numberless the imprecations they muttered. At their head strode Lars, staring round him, and pointing now and again to some huge trunk or boulder as he signified that he recognized familiar landmarks.

The night was dull and heavy. Thick clouds moved sluggishly across the sky, opening at short intervals to let down a ray of light from the crescent moon.

Now and again, disturbed by some erratic stumble from one or other member of the party, the half-waked chuckle of a willow grouse was heard ; the shrill cries of the owls answered each other from thicket to thicket. Here and there huge patches of winter-drift lay white between the boulders and were religiously skirted by the party, who desired to leave no trail. Once or twice lean black shapes swerved shadow-like across their path, only the gleam of a pair of savage eyes proclaiming that a wolf's lair had been invaded, so ghost-like did they flit from one dark

recess of the undergrowth to another. Out of the pine trees the occasional gurgle of a night-jar came startlingly.

An hour's toil among the branches and boulders and the tinkle of running water broke upon their ears. At a gesture from their guide, they turned to the right and debouched upon the bank of a rivulet, a little brook that leaped and plashed from pool to pool, laving great rocks that stemmed its course among shallows a bare foot deep. Only the worn and smooth course of the rocky channel showed to what heights it rose in winter or autumn spate.

The guide looked eagerly from right to left. Then stealthily he crept forward and laid his hand upon a boulder face. He shook his head as he passed his palm over the smooth surface and stepped on to another. Some half dozen times did he finger the mighty stones that ridged across the stream without result. At the seventh or eighth attempt an exclamation broke from him. Turning, he beckoned to the Colonel, who

crept noiselessly to his side. Catching his master's hand, Pladja placed it beside his own. The Colonel felt a rough cross graven in the stone.

"My own mark, one of noble birth," exclaimed the Finn, with suppressed excitement. "Between these stones I saw the cup and sceptre rise. Beneath our very feet lies the treasure."

In low-voiced tones Desmond and Preobeslas consulted, and their purpose took shape as follows:

Centrally down the channel of the watercourse they threw up a ridge of sand and stone, running it parallel with the banks, and not striving as yet to divert the streamlet's course. Some three or four yards above where they believed the treasure to lie, they began their embankment, stemming the current with a huge boulder. Working down from this they dug sand and silt with vigorous spade strokes, and soon a ridge about three feet high began to stand up in midstream.

While the sailors continued to pile up and strengthen this embankment, Desmond and the Colonel proceeded to hurl stones and lumps between the head of the new-made mound and the shore, joining the two slantingly, and gradually deflecting the water into the narrowed channel, down which it coursed deeper and swifter in its straitened bounds.

As the last of the pools drained away and left the sandy intervals dry, they left this work and took their stand before the rock first indicated by the Finn.

With spade and mattock they flung themselves upon the river bed and hurled aside the sand with eager haste. For ten minutes they toiled unrewarded. Then the Colonel resigned his spade to Pladja. Desmond, in better training, and with the determination of youth, stuck to his task. The other six continued to buttress the bulwark of sand between these workers and the stream outside.

Suddenly there was a chink, Pladja flung down his spade and seized the object

against which it had struck. He held it up in the wavering moonlight, and in a trice all nine had gathered about him, peering with straining eyes at what he held. It was a huge disk of metal—that much could be ascertained in the dimness of the overhanging boughs—but it was not till a sudden parting of the clouds sent down a shaft of silver light between the pines, that the nature of the thing was accurately seen. A broad salver of virgin gold was poised in the Finn's hands, richly embossed and chased. The figures were slightly dulled and worn by the action of the damp earth, but they shone with a lustre no other metal could match. It was unmistakable in its soft sheen.

Here was no doubt the trophy of some raid of long ago, when the fierce Lapps and Finns carried sword and fire into many a soft Southern lagoon—probably a portion of Sacrament plate from some wealthy abbey, or perchance the festival dish of some proud count or baron.

To Desmond's mind rose quickly a dis-

jointed half-thought comparison of the gay banquets or solemn masses in which this relic of a long-forgotten past had played a part, with its grim unearthing now in the depths of the silent forest from the bed of a pebbly stream. He thought of the joyous or devout concourse that had formerly surrounded it, compared with the little band of adventurers now dragging it forth in haste and secrecy from its hiding-place of centuries. From hand to hand the salver passed, and greedy fingers played about its carvings. Then it was laid aside and two fresh workers took the spades and flung the sand aside from the place of its sepulture.

The hunt began to wax furious. At first the treasure came up in single objects, but as the hole grew in size, in heaps. The very heart of the hoard was laid bare. Great beakers there were, with curious handles and grotesque embossings; necklets of gold and silver with precious stones aglint in them; carven crosses and candlesticks,

the spoil of many a sacked monastery and convent; plate of all conditions and descriptions, from huge wassail jugs of gallon capacity to the delicate flagons of the ladies' bower. Money, too, was there in quantities —old coins in handfuls, from which the bags had perished by damp and decay; strings of beads in amber and mother-of-pearl, over which many a finger long dead had counted pious prayers; lumps of precious metal as yet unworked, or molten down from other objects for easier transport; uncut gems, bracelets, torques, anklets, brooches—a giant hoard of all the richest spoils of the day when civilization was not and lust of gain was strong.

They gathered up this harvest of the streamlet bed and bestowed it in the coal bags they had brought. When the burdens were arranged, each man fairly staggered under his load of treasure. Before they set out on their homeward march they broke down the dam of earth and let in the streamlet rejoicing to its natural bed. Then each

heaved up his appointed share, and, Pladja leading, began the weary march back to the sea. It was no light task, that stumble through the forest. For every mile they had trodden before, two seemed to stretch out along their return.

The roughnesses of scrub and boulder over which they had stridden lightly in the buoyancy of hope and in the promise of adventure now seemed serried and rampant against them as they staggered under their loads. They tripped and slid; they wearied utterly; they grew numb to any chance of discovery and cursed aloud without regard.

Worn out, with the perspiration standing in beads upon their foreheads, with muscles stiff as wire ropes and limbs that ached in every joint, they reeled at last down the sands of the little rock-ringed bay, and called softly for their boat.

Then from behind each boulder at their back rose a grey-coated man, and with sudden and simultaneous action they were seized about the arms and flung face to earth. By

deft, sinuous fingers were they bound and laid helpless on the sand.

From the stern of the yacht a torch flared up and a line of grinning faces showed over the taffrail. Beside the torchbearer stood a grey-uniformed man who bowed in mockery towards the Colonel and his companions.

"Greeting, noble cousin," he called, "Greeting to my poor hospitality."

CHAPTER VII.

DESMOND'S LUCK IN BEING A SMOKER.

IN the grey of the dawning a procession wound down the aisles of the pine forest, straggling dismally among the littered debris of the woods. At the head strode a dark, heavily moustached man in the uniform of an officer of Russian Infantry. Beside him, carrying coal bags, were a dozen bowed figures. As he surveyed their strong exertion under the weight they bore he smiled complacently and stroked his chin. He eyed their burdens greedily, then his glance strayed to the tail of the procession, where, handcuffed and roped, a score and a half of captives slunk between as many guards. He chuckled aloud in his glee, and once, as Preobeslas raised his head and shot a fiery glance at him, lifted his cap and saluted him mockingly.

"Soyez le bienvenu, mon cousin, soyez le bienvenu," he called ironically, and pointed before him with a laugh.

An imprecation shot from between the Colonel's teeth, and he whispered to his companion, Desmond, who stumbled beside him.

"The dog! My life for his if I have but luck. But my Hilmar, my Hilmar. If I did but know of her safety."

"He can't possibly have captured her," muttered the other. "D'you suppose he wouldn't have been throwing it in your teeth and glorying over you by now if he had. She has found refuge among your people somehow. You may be sure of it. It must be so," he continued fiercely, insistently. "He doesn't even know of her being here. He thinks her left behind at Stockholm."

"Who can tell?" sighed the Colonel. "He is fit for any devilishness. My God! If she should be in his hands! But she knows how to die—as do all Polish gentlewomen. She has her little pistol."

"Don't," shuddered Desmond. "For God's sake. I can't bear to think of it. I should go mad."

The Colonel turned to him. "What can it be to you compared with me—her father, on whose responsibility her coming rests. Damn those fools of yours who let themselves be surprised," he burst out with the sudden irritation born of utter despair. "'Tis ever an Englishman who in his thick-hided conceit believes himself beyond the possibility of an over-reach. But for them we might be sailing—ah, forgive me, my friend," as Desmond's white face and haggard eyes showed his silent misery, "I am an old man. She was my one hope. I am unstrung, I babble I know not what. The fault is mine, mine alone. Forgive——"

One of the guards turned and hit the speaker across the shoulder with his ramrod.

"Silence," he shouted. "Silence, you muttering old reprobate. Name of all the Saints, can't you obey the commands of your

superior?" and he glanced to the head of the procession for approval.

Desmond's face flushed a passionate crimson as he saw this outrage on the father of his heart's desire. With a roar of reckless rage he leaped at the fellow, and bringing his fettered hands above his head, smote his handcuffs with fearful force into the other's eyes. A stream of blood burst from the wound and flooded the battered face; blinded and stunned, the scoundrel staggered back into the arms of a companion. Paul Preobeslas turned just in time to see the blow. With a snarl of rage he snatched a rifle from the soldier beside him, and scarce taking aim fired point blank at the Englishman as he stood across his foe. As the clatter of the shot died into the echoes, Desmond flung up his hands and spun round. With a thud he fell upon his face, rolled half over and slid back again; as his body settled into the angle between two boulders a shiver twitched his shoulders; then he lay still.

A groan rose from all the captives as they stood paralyzed by the sudden tragedy. The groan became a shout and they flung themselves desperately upon their guards and fought, swinging each his fettered wrists. A vain struggle. Within five minutes all were battered and roped into utter subjection and the long line of bruised wretches was stumbling anew down the track, half blinded, bleeding, smitten, and cowed. At the head again the leader raged, venting furious curses, while between two of his fellows the disfigured soldier was led, bemoaning his sightless eyes, over which the blood caked continually as it welled from his scarred cheeks.

Before they left they raised and looked at the prone figure between the stones. A red ooze was spreading over Desmond's side. His face was colorless. His inert body was limp and the clothes hung haggard about him. The breath was silent between his white lips.

"A cursed shrewd shot, Captain," said

the sergeant. "This cock will crow no more."

"Damn the English dog," answered the officer. "Let the carrion rot. A fit meal for the forest. Let wolf eat wolf. There'll be little left of him by morning."

They flung the body back among the stones and continued down the faint forest track. For some few minutes the crackle of their tread among the underwood was heard and the gleam of the bayonets showed through the pine needles. Then quiet fell again upon the forest. Upon the boulders Desmond slept motionless.

A stealthy step among the scrub, and a white face looked out from behind a rock and glanced anxiously round. Then lightly a girl ran across the glade and sank to her knees beside Desmond's body. The tears were streaming down her cheeks. The sobs choked her as she bent over him and chafed his listless hands. From her pocket she took a flask and poured a drop or two between his clenched teeth. There was a

"SANK TO HER KNEES BESIDE DESMOND'S BODY."

cough, and a faint color rose to his face. His eyes opened and stared at her with wondering inquiry. Suddenly he sat up and gazed round him amazedly. Hilmar's surprise at this resurrection of the seeming dead matched his own at finding himself in unexpected surroundings.

"Don't move, don't move," she implored. "You'll bleed to death. Please, please, lie still till I can get help."

Desmond winked and blinked at her stupidly. Then, with an effort, he stood up. Hilmar gasped in her amazement. He slapped himself about the ribs with a grimace; then he stared confusedly down at the blood-smear on his side. He thrust his hand beneath his jacket and tugged at something. He produced a jagged bit of silver that winked cheerfully in the sunlight. A hoarse giggle broke from him.

"Pooped, by Jove," he chuckled,—"and pooped like a backstop."

"He's delirious," sobbed Hilmar, in despair. "What shall I do?"

At her voice Desmond's wits began to grow to him again. He took the girl's hand and held it fast. The color was back in his face finely now. "Dear Miss Preobeslas, I assure you I'm right as the mail. The beggar hit my cigarette case edgeways and my pocket-book. The bullet never penetrated. Bar having every vestige of breath knocked out of me, I'm as fit as be da——as a fiddle, I mean."

The girl eyed him doubtfully. "But the blood," she gasped. "You must be wounded."

"Never a bit," he answered cheerily. "A jag of my cigarette case has just scratched me, that's all. Any bit of sticking plaster will put that right. But how on earth did you get here?"

"I followed you last night. I saw you find the treasure. I watched you all the time; after the first few minutes I was never twenty yards from you. I walked behind you all the way back. I wanted to triumph over father and all of you, and

show that I was quite capable of sharing your adventure. I was going to burst upon you, and —and—laugh at you, when I saw those horrible men rise up and fell you. I just kept from screaming and ran back into the shadow. Then I didn't know what to do. I was so frightened all alone. At last I thought of our old jager, Stefan. He lives in a little cottage in the woods apart from the village. It's he who always sent father the rents he managed to collect. It took me two hours to get there ,and it was still dark when I arrived. I didn't dare knock, in case there should be some one with him. So I sat about in the bushes till morning, and then he came out and I knew him. When I ran down he crossed himself and tried to exorcise me," and a watery smile crossed her face; "he thought I was a ghost. He took me in and gave me food. Then he went out to reconnoitre and told me that you were all coming along bound. Then I watched with him and saw you killed, as I thought," and the speaker's lips

trembled. "Stefan has gone on to see what becomes of dear father and the rest. Now we must go back to Stefan's cottage and think what's to be done."

Desmond took her hand again, "Whatever we find to do, Miss Hilmar," he said, with a look into her eyes that made the long lashes droop, "believe me that only with my life will I give up the attempt to free your father." Then the girl led the way silently down the narrow forest path.

They walked quickly through the tangle of the pine trunks, the girl leading. Half an hour saw them enter a little clearing of the forest, where a trellised log hut centred.

An old man, bent with age and with features furrowed by many a winter gale, welcomed Hilmar with ejaculations of commiseration and anxiety. Sending her into the inner room, he insisted on Desmond removing his coat, and proceeded to dress the scarred side with a decoction of lily leaves and brandy. Then, with hospitable haste, he set bread and fish before them and waited

on them, stopping now and again to pat his young mistress's shoulder, muttering pious prayers to the Mother of God and all Saints to preserve his master the Colonel and send him release from the hands of his enemies.

As they ate and fortified themselves for what should betide, the old forester explained his doings since he left them to follow the soldiers.

"It is but a poor report I have," he said mournfully; "they are all bestowed in the orchard barn. The walls are three feet thick, as you know. And there is the moat. How can we reach them?"

"Won't the people join us? Surely the whole village is at our back to help their master?"

"In sympathy, one of noble birth. But you don't remember. Let us prevail in the combat. What betides? For the moment we are successful. Down come a couple of regiments and ravage the countryside Two risings have I seen. Every tenth man goes to the mines. The tax hangs over the land

for years. I speak not for myself. My old body is nothing worth. Willingly would I give it for the master. But the others—that is different. Besides, the man has a brace of cannon, as well as twoscore of the soldiers. Ever since he came he has known himself unsafe."

The poor girl covered her face with her hands and sobbed: "My father, my father! What can I do? It is death for him, death, and I am left alone. Oh, what can I do? What can I do?"

Desmond put his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Dear Miss Hilmar, there is always hope while he is alive. Don't despair. Your cousin doesn't know there are two of us hovering round to find every loophole of escape. The only guard will be from the inside. We have every chance for a rescue."

She dried her eyes and looked up at him with a gratitude shining in her face that sent his pulses dancing.

"You shame me," she answered. "Just

when I should be strong to plan for father, I break down and whine like a beaten puppy. You are wounded and have nothing to save but your own life, and yet you are willing to risk it for us, whom you have only known a week or two."

"It's just because I want the acquaintance to last a lifetime," said Desmond, with a tender look in his brave eyes, and for the second time that morning Hilmar blushed delightfully beneath her undried tears.

It was by devious ways and the darkest recesses of the forest that old Stefan took them that evening, till from among the belt of laurels that fringed the castle garden they looked upon the prison-house that held their friends. The castle and all the outbuildings lay in the form of a square upon an island, circled by an irregular moat. The river made a bend almost at right angles and looped itself about an acre of grass land. A channel cut across the narrowest diameter of the promontory made the water defences entire. On the far side of the stream were

walls both broad and high. The only entrance was by a drawbridge and beneath an arch. Along the wall head the clank of weapons was to be heard, showing that beneath them sentries strode. It was a fortress seemingly impregnable.

"'Tis the eastern wing that holds the great barn, and there they are bestowed," said Stefan sadly. "Nothing but artillery could pierce those walls."

Hilmar stared at the grey stones hopelessly, her gaze finally wandering to Desmond's face with a glance of despairing appeal. He was gnawing his moustache as he silently ruminated on the situation. Then he broke out:

"One of the worst difficulties to me is the getting away. If we did manage to release them, there is still the guard on the yacht. They'll have to bring out your father and the rest to get them down to Osbrog. We might manage something on the way. But without the yacht to get off in, what could we do?"

Hilmar translated to old Stefan.

"That's no great difficulty," said he. "If the captain of noble birth can extract them from these walls, I will charge myself with the guard on the yacht. There are but a half dozen of them," he added contemptuously.

"How?" cried Hilmar. "You!"

"Yes," answered the old man meekly, "but that you shall see when the time comes. The first question is the scaling of these walls." Desmond was still staring at the walls that stood out in such uncompromising grimness across the sheen of moonlit water. Unconsciously he gnawed at his fingers, thinking, planning, rejecting desperate proposal after proposal, as they formed in his brain. Suddenly at the far corner of the building his gaze stayed and fixed itself. Still gnawing at his knuckles, he looked, and looked, working and turning over his new-formed idea. He turned to his companions.

"That group of poplars there—is that opposite the barn?"

"Yes," said Stefan wearily. "'Tis almost exactly opposite. But there the stream is deepest, though not so wide."

"Can we get into the clump without being seen?"

"Assuredly. None know of our presence. We are not expected."

"Come, then. I begin to see light."

The three wormed and scuffled through the thick underscrub of laurel and rhododendron and by slow degrees and with immense caution reached at last the water's edge beneath the tall trees whose branches shot out across the stream. Here they halted, and Desmond scanned the distance with his eye.

"How do they get light and air into the barn?" he asked the old jäger. "Where are the windows?"

"There at the edge of the roof, one of noble birth. Look at the eaves against the sky, and you will see the bars stick out in places."

Desmond slapped his leg joyfully. "By

gum!" he whispered, "I think I have it! What sort of a place is it inside?"

"A jolly old, smooth-paved, empty room at this time of year," said Hilmar. "I well remember playing there when I was a tiny child. The walls run up to the two windows Stefan speaks of. The rafters are bare. There is no ceiling—only heavy slabs of stone upon strong beams."

"What's to prevent our fellows climbing up and working through, then?" demanded Desmond.

"You forget, Excellency. They are bound. The walls are smooth. The windows are heavily barred."

"Humph! Then what it wants is a friend on the roof who will file the bars, get in and cut their bonds, and show them how to climb up a rope and on to the roof."

"And then?" said Hilmar, breathlessly.

"Then! Why back to the yacht again and out to sea as hard as we can go."

"But how can any one get on to the roof? There is the river to swim. The walls are

smooth and without a single crevice of hand-hold. The drawbridge is up at night. No one can enter except under supervision."

"I have my plan," said Desmond, hopefully. "It is a desperate one, I allow, but the case is desperate, too. What I want is a good long rope, a weight of some kind, and a good file. I daresay my six-shooter won't come amiss, either. Now you see this long arm of the poplar,—it stretches half way across the stream. Suppose I crawl out as far as I can, and tie the weight to the end of my rope. When I get as far as I can without the bough breaking, I begin to swing the cord like a pendulum, till it flies out right over the window bars. Then I let it drop a foot or two and it catches and lodges in a corner of the grating. I shall pull it as tight as I can, and there you have the bridge I want."

"But—but you can't swing across a thin rope like that."

"No, but I can if it's a thick one, and that it'll have to be, if the others are to come back

across it. When I get on to the roof I can file the bars, drop down into the prison, untie the others, and then back we all troop through the forest as hard as we can split. Stefan says he's going to have the yacht ready for us—how, I don't know, but that's his affair—before morning we shall be forty miles out into the Baltic, and it's twenty to one on our eluding any old ark they've got to send after us. It's as simple as getting shaved."

Hilmar and Stefan both shook their heads. The proposal seemed so utterly crackbrained.

"Supposing the Captain gets on the roof," said the latter, "how does he know he can file the bars? The sentries will see him. He will only waste his own life purposely. Why not wait till they are brought out to travel down to Osbrog?"

"Because we shall be three to thirty then," answered Desmond. "How can we attack half a company of armed soldiers? No, my plan is the only feasible one."

"I can't let you," said Hilmar, desperately.

"It isn't honorable. Why should you risk yourself for us. No, I won't permit it."

Desmond smiled quietly. "I am going, Miss Hilmar. Don't let us discuss anything but the way and means. After all, if I was taken we should be no worse off than we are now."

"Much worse off," replied Hilmar, "because you too would be in the hands of those wretches. Is it nothing to me, do you think," she added, with sudden passion, "that you should risk your life?"

Desmond's eyes lit up with a glow of tenderness. "I—I hoped it might be something," he said simply. "But do you think there is no happiness to me in adventuring something for you and yours?"

Hilmar looked up at him for a moment without speaking. Her eyes were like stars in the soft twilight of the shadow.

"It must be as you wish," she said gravely. "But if you are taken—are taken—" and a sob escaped her as she

strove for words—"what has life left for me?"

"The memory that to two men, at least, you were all in all," said Desmond, and he put out his hand and met hers as it strayed towards him, as if it sought support in this sudden strain of despair. "As if I could fail *now*," he added triumphantly, pressing the shaking little palm.

Suddenly, impulsively, the girl raised his clasping hand to her lips and kissed it. Then, with a burning face, she gave a whispered command to old Stefan and began hastily to thread her way through the bushes and back into the forest.

Desmond stood for a minute like one to whom the gates of paradise are opened. He regarded his right hand in a sort of ecstatic amaze. Then quickly he pressed it to his own lips, as if transferring that precious influence to safer keeping. As one in a dream he followed the other two, and the whole party disappeared in the mazes of the forest,

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD STEFAN'S VODKI. — DESMOND EMULATES THE CATS.

THE saloon of the "Hendrik Hudson" would have been a sore sight to the eyes of Menzies, the Scotch steward, if he had been there to see its terrible dishevellment. Round the table four dirty, sheep-skinned soldiers sat and fingered a filthy pack of cards. In each mouth was stuck an evil-smelling cigar, and innumerable stains of jugs and tumblers marked the smooth mahogany. The cellaret doors had been burst open by the kicks of lusty boots, and books, broken crockery, and a heap of little knick-knacks strewed the floor. The company had evidently feasted where it slept. The dirty plates and knives of the previous evening meal were tossed carelessly

into a corner unwashed and sticky. The mud of shore and forest was thick on carpets and chairs.

One of the men took a sup from a jug beside him and cursed aloud. "To call this thin wash liquor," he complained. "I'd rather have the scourings of a vodki cup whence all had gone but the smell."

"Hog's drink; cat lap," agreed another. "Never a sup of real spirit can I find aboard. Nothing but this watery red filth."

Menzies would have been delighted at this. None but he and his master knew the hiding-place of the grog-room. By no means a bad plan on board a yacht, if you can trust your steward; an exceedingly bad one if you can't.

The claret would have been the delight of a gourmet. Among these savage Tartars nothing short of vitriol—and cheap vodki is that—deserved an encomium. So, though they continued to sup at the jug perfunctorily, they didn't cease to condemn the contents. The irritation born of their

unaccustomed swilling made them quarrel hugely over their cards. They bandied accusations of cheating freely from one to the other. The atmosphere was thick with noisome smoke and heated words.

A hail came from their comrades on the deck. One of them thrust his head below the raised skylight, summoning them to come quickly.

They reeled up the companion and stared stupidly round them across sea and shore. One of the men who had been on deck pointed to where a cleft in the ring of rocks showed the cliffs of the further bay. About three hundred yards away a man could be seen digging methodically at the crag foot. Beside him lay a brown object, indistinguishable at that distance, The fellow was throwing up the sand energetically and looked neither to the right hand nor the left. There was but the one narrow slit in the ringing rocks that gave view upon him at all. It was evident he knew nothing of the nearness of the yacht.

"UNCONSCIOUSLY HE TOILED ON AT HIS DIGGING."

Yaroslaff, the corporal, snapped his fingers in his delight. "What should a man bury here?" quoth he. "Why, what we're bemoaning the want of. Liquor, my boys, good liquor. I've always heard this was a bay for the smugglers. He's leaving this for the Lapps, without a doubt. Now shall we both preserve the law of the Empire and get refreshment fit for gentlemen and soldiers. But quietly, you little pigeons, quietly, and we'll see what the old scoundrel's up to."

They stole silently across the gangway and wormed among the shore rocks till in a circle they stood behind the man. Unconsciously he toiled on at his digging, and the grins grew upon the soldiers' faces. Finally, as he delved away, Vladimer, a young recruit, contained himself no longer. He burst into a roar of laughter and strode forward, holding his sides; nor were the others slow to join in his hilarious bawlings. The man started up with a jerk of surprise. He faced round upon them tremblingly, his eyes wide and

staring. He sank upon the sand and lifted his hands to the corporal appealingly.

"Mercy, captain, mercy. It is but a little I store against the winter."

The corporal smote his shoulder in good-humored ferocity.

"Son of a dog!" he shouted. "As if I didn't know you and your ways. Why should Stefan the forester store good liquor out here. You want to trade with the Lapps, a thing strictly forbidden; as well you know, you desperate old contrabandist. Now a great fine will be due from you."

"Mercy," said old Stefan, grovelling. "Mercy, sir. It is a little, little barrel, and I am of the poorest. All mine is yours, if you but forbear the reporting of me."

"This," said Yaroslaff, picking up the barrel, "is neither yours nor mine. It belongs to the State, in whose name I confiscate it. But our little Father the Czar always judges the laborer worthy of the hire, I have exhausted myself in tracking this foul piece of smugglery. I need a tonic. Here I shall

find it. Whose vodki is it, O wicked old man?"

"Ivan's," answered the old jäger, trembling, "but——"

"Ivan's!" yelled the corporal. "You waste on filthy scum of Lapps the divinest elixir ever distilled. Of a surety, Stefan, you are imbecile as well as particularly evil. I taste to see if you lie."

He raised the keg and took a mouthful. His eyes rolled; he gasped as he set it down, and slapped his chest ecstatically.

"Ivan's liquid fire, by all that's holy!" he bawled. "Nay,"—as the others crowded round demanding their share—"Nay, lads, this must be wasted in no unmethodical swillings on a forsaken shore. Let us have it in well-ordered cups in the comfort of the cabin. The court adjudges Stefan to hard labor as watch on deck while we dispose of the spoil," and tucking the keg under his arm he marched back to the ship, while the soldiers rained their rude attempts at wit on the old forester, who followed them submissively.

The six swaggered joyously across the gangway and descended into the cabin. Stefan they bade, with many imprecations, to stay on deck and summon them if any one appeared. Then shortly from the cabin came sounds of the clink of glass and boisterous toasts and jestings, rising at last to uproar as the hot liquor fumed into their brains.

The turmoil lasted but a short time. The jests grew less frequent, the snatches of song more maudlin; finally both died away into incoherent mutterings. The corporal's head began to nod ominously and suddenly thudded forward upon the table. One of his tipsy comrades solemnly emptied a glass of the spirit over it. The fellow never even moved. The other five were leaden-eyed and blinked stupidly one upon the other, drinking still with automatic insistence, clutching their glasses with nerveless hands. First one and then another yawned, rubbed his eyes, looked round gapingly, and then surged forward, till he, too, like his leader, rolled his head upon the table and slept

stertorously. Soon no sound came up to the watcher on deck save snores—a round chorus of heavy grunts, that shook the tumblers on the table and made the very deck-planks tremble.

Cautiously Stefan peered beneath the open skylight and looked down on the six motionless bodies below. Satisfied with his scrutiny, he withdrew his head and descended into the cabin. He examined each man carefully and shook his shoulders, clapping his hand upon them heavily, while he bawled aloud the name of each torpid sot. No answer came to his callings. Not one of them so much as winked an eye. He came on deck again and went forward. Selecting a coil of rope, he took it back with him, and with slow, methodical action took out his clasp knife and cut it into short lengths. With these he bound each man securely hand and foot. Then ranging them in a row upon the cabin floor, he placed a cushion or footstool beneath each head and left them there, rigid, unconscious, lashed up into the

similitude of half-a-dozen graven images. Taking the rest of the vodki he carefully bore it on deck and poured it into the sea. Then, lighting his pipe, he drew a deck chair beside the taffrail and as the evening closed about him sat there waiting, watching, looking into the night, alert and expectant.

Five miles away beside the castle moat stood Hilmar and Desmond. Girt about his waist was a long coil of cord, and sheathed in his belt was his knife, flanked by a file and a brace of pistols. In his hand he held a crowbar. For an instant he stayed and looked down at his companion; the moment for the attempt was come.

"Good-by, Hilmar—*dear*." The last word came shyly and haltingly. He looked at her half doubtfully.

She turned her eyes up to his wistfully. They were shining with unshed tears, but her glance was brave and there was no tremor in her voice. "Good-by, Mr. Desmond, *dear*," she answered with a tender

inflection on the word that had come so falteringly from him. She pronounced it steadily; somehow her lips closed over it with a delicious pout. Desmond wavered and looked at her almost inquiringly. Then he stooped and kissed and met with no repulse.

With the touch of that sweet farewell on his lips and no room in his heart for fear or aught but triumph, he turned silently from her and caught at a poplar bough. He swung his legs across it, rose up and gained another higher. Thus from bough to bough he swung himself till thirty feet above the ground he reached the great limb that shot out above the water, stretching far towards the castle walls. He made his way along it inch by inch, desisting only when its drooping twigs told him that the furthest point of safety was reached. He unslung the cord from his waist, attached to one end his crowbar, and silently began to swing it to and fro. Backwards and forwards it pendulated, widening its reach at every

beat, till finally its utmost swing brought it over the barn roof. There was a ring of metal, and the cord quivered and stayed taut. Desmond pulled with all his strength. The rope was rigid. Then he lashed the end he held to the bough beside him. The gulf was bridged.

He waited a minute or two to see if any sentry had heard the clang of the meeting iron. Faintly up and down the courtyard he could hear the regular beat of steps. These stopped and the sound of a grating lock came distinctly to him across the silence of the night. A ray of light shot up through the casement in the roof. The man must have heard the faint clatter of the falling bar and was examining his prisoners to see if any one stirred. In some ways it was a fortunate matter. Seeing them safe and still bound, he would be less likely to visit them during the next hour or two. The light snapped out and the bang of a shutting door re-echoed in the hollow of the yard. There was a jingle of keys as the warder drew

them from the lock; then to and fro the monotonous beat of the sentry was resumed.

Desmond gripped the rope with both hands and swung his knees across it. It ran at a steep angle towards the roof, and it took him all his strength to restrain too swift a descent. Checking his way strenuously with alternate graspings of the cord, he slid down and alighted beside the window grating. He had to use the utmost caution to prevent dislodging the stone roof slabs. Splinters, the result of many a winter's frost, lay about him in heaps. Fortunately those he displaced fell almost noiselessly into the stream. Any one hearing them might mistake them for the rise of feeding fish. He took from his pocket a little jar of grease and smeared it on the central bar of the grating. Then with his rasp he began to rub at the iron, eating steadily through the metal, which was rusted by storm and damp to half its original thickness. He kept to his work without ceasing, save to rub now and again

more grease into the niche he made, swinging the long file backwards and forwards, pressing desperately upon the bars, gasping with excitement and the energy of his toil, the perspiration raining from his forehead. Half an hour of unceasing toil and the bar broke. Rising to his feet he sought a sure foothold, and then seized the severed end and tore it slowly back. The metal, softened by exposure, gave under his strenuous tugs. Unfortunately, as he bent and pried it back, the far end snapped at the angle of the bend. With a clatter that sounded out with horrible distinctness, he fell prone upon the roof. He lay still, his heart throbbing in great beats that seemed to suffocate him. The steps of the sentry ceased in the courtyard. He could but have heard the clatter and his suspicions were aroused. Then a desperate idea came into Desmond's head. "Yee-ow, Yee-ow," he miauled, the tremor of his voice giving a particularly feline ring to the sounds. "Yee-ow, Fzz-st," and he spat and scrabbled at an

imaginary rival, dislodging one or two bits of shale recklessly.

"Ugh," grunted the sentry, and picking up a pebble, cast it at the roof and resumed his walk down the centre courtyard. The stone fell within a yard of Desmond's face and, rebounding, struck him over the eye. If he could have found it, he felt he should like to preserve it as a precious relic. He resumed his work at the next bar with greater caution, and though it was stouter than the first, an hour's work saw it, too, broken. He twisted it aside and fastened his remaining rope to the side of the grating. Then wriggling his body feet first through the opening, he caught the loose end between his hands and slid down into the darkness of the barn.

The prisoners must have heard his operations on the roof, but no sound came up to him. He landed gently on the floor, let go the rope, and began to feel round him with groping hands. For a yard or two he crept about in the darkness, finding nothing. He

gave a slight whisper; no answer came. With beating heart he strode forward, playing out his hands before him. Nothing met his touch but a blank wall. With sickening disappointment at his heart, he crawled round the walls, feeling stretching, grasping at emptiness. He crossed and recrossed the floor aimlessly. The result was everywhere the same. His adventure was vain. The barn was empty, the floor smooth and void as when Hilmar played in it in the days of long ago.

As this was borne upon him he turned despairingly to the rope to climb forth again and renew his search elsewhere. He clutched the rope and began to haul himself up hand by hand. There was a quiver and a grate from above. The iron framework stirred and began to move. He drew himself up with quick, desperate jerks. Too late. With a crash and a clang the bars came away from the walls and fell clattering to the hard stone pavement. A corner struck him and bleeding and half stunned he rolled upon the floor, a prisoner indeed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AWAKENING OF PAUL PREOBESLAS.

THE sentry in the courtyard kept to his ceaseless trampings. His thoughts were in the guard-room at the far corner of the buildings, where a fire made light and warmth. He shivered in the cold moonlight and longed for the appointed end of his vigil, yet two good hours away. He envied furiously his comrades stretched at length on the truckle bedsteads among warm layers of straw.

Suddenly out of the emptiness of the barn behind him resounded a clatter and the ring of iron. He stopped, swung upon his heel, and looked across at the building gapingly. He swore with great exasperation. "The devil take all cats," he muttered, "and burn all kittens. But I suppose I must examine."

He strode across to the door, fumbling at

his keys. He leaned his rifle against the wall and inserted the key in the rusty wards. Slowly he pushed back the nail-studded panels. Holding his lantern above his head, he entered and looked uncertainly about him. From behind the door a dark figure rose silently, and with terrific force dashed an iron bar upon his head. The unfortunate soldier dropped like a stone, a grunt as of a felled bullock issuing from between his half-closed lips. The lamp clattered to the stones and was extinguished in a moment. Then silently and carefully the door was closed upon the prostrate victim and his assailant.

For another half hour quiet reigned in the courtyard. Then noiselessly the barn door opened and a soldier came out. He picked up the rifle which still leant against the wall, and swinging his keys in his hand strode steadily up the yard and stayed and listened at another door in the end of the same building.

He stooped to the keyhole. A sound of

measured breathing came from within, and an audible snore here and there broke the silence. He took his keys and tried them one by one at the lock. It was not till the fifth or sixth attempt that one fitted and worked easily through the wards. He pushed the door from him and entered.

His lantern showed a bare mud-floored room, and lying about it in various attitudes of uneasy rest were thirty men, bound, draggled and filthy. With one exception they slept the sleep of hunger and utter exhaustion. Bound hand and foot, leaning his back against the wall, was Colonel Preobeslas, blinking wearily at him in the dim light, his eyes peering out suspiciously from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Curses be yours, fellow," he said in Russian. "Can't we get any sleep without being roused up and stared at every half hour of the night?"

The soldier carefully closed the door, set down the lantern, and advanced toward him, a knife gleaming in his hand.

"You damned assassin," said the Colonel, staring up at him fiercely, "do you mean to murder me?"

The soldier put his fingers warningly to his lips, bent down, and with a neat slash or two smote off the lashings that bound the Colonel's feet and hands. Preobeslas felt a salt tear drop upon his face as the other bent over him.

He looked up amazedly, then started back and rubbed his eyes, petrified with astonishment. "Desmond!" he exclaimed. "Desmond! Have you risen from the dead?"

The sham soldier laid his fingers on his lip. "No noise if you can help, Colonel. Everything is yet to do. Hilmar is safe," he whispered, "but we must get these others freed, and then the business is half begun. We must surprise the guard and get their rifles."

The Colonel was still staring, staring, as one in a dream. "In the name of goodness—" he began.

Desmond held up his hand. "Not now,

my dear sir. All in good time. Come with me," and he walked across to where Barr snored heavily in the far corner, his head pillowed on a heap of floor scrapings, his bound limbs huddled into a knotted pose of discomfort.

They cut his cords and passed on. Thus they made the tour of the entire number. Desmond cut and the Colonel stayed for a moment beside each half-wakened man to convince him of his freedom and to impress the necessity of silence into his sleep-dulled brain.

Finally, thirty men stood up, wakened, free, and burning for what might betide in the matter of revenge for their captivity and despoiling. It took but a few moments to inform the Colonel of the manner of his daughter's escape and her share in Desmond's rescue. The old warrior snorted like a war-horse in his delight, and stood forward eager for the fray, now his devouring anxiety on her account was appeased. He even ventured to smile comically.

"The little vixen!" he said. "To think that our release is due to her disobedience. She will be neither to hold nor bind in future. But what next, my dear fellow?"

"According to old Stefan, the guard-room is in the far corner. There is a guard of a dozen and a sergeant. The first thing is to settle them and get their arms. The rest, he says, sleep in a long dormitory in the west wing. But they can wait till we overpower the others; we must do it in silence, if possible."

They opened the door again, and stealthily the line of sailors crept across the courtyard to where the red glow of fire shone through an open doorway. A dozen grey uniforms showed patchily through the heaped straw upon some truckle beds, but before the fire sat a single man and nursed his face, groaning eloquently. A sleep-murdering case of toothache, without a doubt.

There was a hurried consultation. Then Desmond and Williams—a sailor of huge

build and strength—stole into the portal. They exchanged a look, and Desmond nodded decisively. Like a flash they crossed the floor and Williams' brawny palm was on the fellow's mouth before he could move. The sight of a knife gleaming in most unpleasant proximity to his throat gave him to understand that the tiniest sound would mean instant death.

The Colonel and the others entered silently, and with their own late bonds they corded up the poor wretch rigidly. Panic and surprise had most evidently routed toothache. His eyes were starting out of his head. The others still slept dreamlessly nor stirred a muscle. Beside each sleeping soldier two Englishmen took their stand. At a given signal a hand was pressed upon each Russian's mouth and two vigorous arms encircled his unresisting body. In almost every case their wrists and ankles were firmly bound before they were fairly awakened.

Lars Pladja came forward and began to

interrogate the sergeant. "Where are your comrades, and how many are there?" he queried.

The sergeant started up sullenly. "Ask the devil," he replied with an oath.

A grim smile rose to the Finn's face. "No need to trouble the master when the servant knows," he said cheerfully. "I shall have to question you with fear, my friend, if you're obstinate," and he drew the sergeant's knife from his leathern belt. "If you forget the lessons of two years ago, sergeant, I don't," and he peered into the other's face.

The soldier stared up in hesitating surprise. "You!" he muttered, "but we found your bones in the forest, along with Karnovitch's and the others and all. I thought the wolves had the lot of you."

"Here I am, ready to play the old game you and Karnovitch taught," said Pladja, "unless you see fit to oblige with information."

The soldier shrank from him and shivered.

"Curse you," he mumbled, as he eyed the blade doublfully, then, as it pricked his throat, "there are a score of them in the long dormitory."

They took up the rifles of the soldiers and rammed home the rod of each to prove if they were loaded. Then, guided by Lars, they left the room, two remaining with naked bayonets in their hands, ready to quell with a lusty thrust any noise or sign of resistance.

Up in the dormitory the scene of the guard-room was repeated. The twenty sleeping soldiers were pinioned and laid in rows upon the floor, and with their weapons the whole party were now armed. They returned to the guard-room.

Lars began to play the inquisitor again. His methods were directness itself. He presented each query at the point of the knife, and the others jerked out replies with unwilling swiftness. By these means he learned in a very short space of time that seven servants slept on the top story; that

Paul Preobeslas had the room that fronted on the top of the staircase—the Colonel ground his teeth, the room had been Hilmar's;—and that besides him and the lieutenant in charge of the soldiers no other person was in the house.

Having gained this information, a select party, consisting of Desmond, Barr, the Colonel and half-a-dozen sailors, set out to verify matters. The others, with rifles loaded, sat down with much content before the guard-room fire to warm their stiffened limbs.

The dreams of Paul Preobeslas were sweet. The roseate probabilities of the future danced in fantastic exaggeration through his brain. He saw himself powerful with his new-gotten wealth, confirmed in his stewardship of his outlaw cousin's estates, moving on by cautious steps to the satrapy of Skelligen, Viceroy at last of Finland, honored and supreme in the councils of the White Czar. Some outside influence moved against his domination. There was a revolution. The

Finns, lashed to fury, were about his path. Their knives gleamed against him; he was down, and over him stood a furious mob desiring his life; he wrestled furiously against them—beating off their desperate grasp. The imaginary swept into the real; he awoke, gaining consciousness of present peril. The influence of his dream still clouded upon his brain—was this indeed the howling turmoil that desired his blood? Saint Paul! they were silent now, but no less grim.

He twisted his head from side to side. Something held it level with the pillow. He blinked upon his captors. Heaven! they were of no flesh and blood. There, heading them, stood that dog of an Englishman whom he had murdered two days back. In the veriest extremity of fear, a scream burst from his lips and pealed down the empty passages and across the courtyard.

A hand was planted on his mouth. "No noise," said a fierce voice, and a bayonet point danced before his eyes. "Where does the lieutenant sleep?" demanded the

same voice imperiously, and the hand was removed.

"My God," muttered the bound wretch, as he recognized the Colonel, "How in the name of all the devils——"

"Silence," said Preobelas sharply. "Answer only my question."

"Here—beside me—in the next room," stammered the fear-stricken poltroon. "But you are not going to——"

"Going to murder him? No, my arch-scoundrel," said the Colonel with furious sarcasm, "though no doubt that's the course which would lend itself to your approval," and he turned away with a gesture of disgust towards the door that led into the next room.

Before he reached it, it opened. A young man stood before him, staring with unutterable amazement. Then like a flash the meaning of the situation broke upon him. The door slammed resoundingly and the bolt could be heard shooting home.

"Down with it," bawled Desmond sav-

agely. "Don't let him escape. He'll get word to Osbrog and bring the cavalry upon us," and he flung himself upon the door, hammering at it thunderously. Half-a-dozen English fists smote beside him, and with a crash the door shot from its hinges and gave crashingly into the room beyond. It was empty, but through another open doorway a long passage showed, and they caught the flutter of a white shirt down the distant corner. With a yell like wolves they bayed upon the fugitive's track, and reached the bottom of a staircase as a door slammed at the top. Up they rushed and smote it to matchwood with their rifle butts. Again the room was empty, but the casement open. It gave upon the leads, and they jostled each other eagerly in the narrow opening to gain the roof. For an instant they stood bewildered. Then from the river below sounded a splash. Down the leads they ran, to where a lower roof stretched ten feet below that they were on. Swimming across the stream was their man, snatching his

way through the current with long desperate strokes, straining for the shore, which was but ten yards distant.

Half-a-dozen bullets spattered about him; one alone found a mark, and that but struck a finger. Before any one could reload he scrambled to his feet and shook his fist with a yell of defiance to the furious faces that lined the parapet. Then, barefoot and naked but for his shirt, he raced for the paddock, where tethered to pegs a dozen horses grazed. Hastily knotting a head rope into a halter, he slipped the bars and led a pony out. He leaped upon its back, smote his hardest with bare heels upon its sides, and with one last yell of derision swept down the forest glades and away into the green depths of pine.

"Gad!" soliloquized Desmond, "it's an infernal nuisance his getting away, but, by gum! he's a good plucked 'un."

"A nuisance," said the Colonel quietly, "it's ruin. In hour the squadron from Osbrog will be upon us."

"Well, then," said Desmond hopefully, "Let's make a bolt for it at once. Please God, Stefan's settled the yacht's crew."

A shot rang out from the forest, followed by a woman's cry. Desmond stood for a moment with blazing eyes, as if struck into stone. Then, with an oath, he dropped upon the lower roof, and from thence into the stream. Half-a-dozen strong strokes sent him across, and he ran dripping into the fastness of the forest. The others raced down the stairway, crossed the courtyard, let the drawbridge fall with a reckless crash, nad swarmed out upon his track. They had not far to run. Up the forest trail appeared two figures—a woman and a man. The former leaned upon the other's arm. The Colonel was the first to recognize his daughter and ran towards her with a speed his old limbs might well have been proud of.

Desmond saw with no envy the kiss the daughter placed upon her father's forehead. One as warm and perchance as fond had greeted him upon the lips but a minute before.

"My Hilmar, my Hilmar," the old man kept repeating as he held her to him and stroked her glossy hair. "But the shot, my child, the shot?"

She smiled up at him. "It wasn't aimed at me, father. That man on horseback, with—with not much on," she smiled irresistibly, and gave a little blush, "he snatched at me as he passed and tried to drag me up to his saddle. I didn't want to kill him, so I shot his horse. He was stunned for a moment. Then Mr. Desmond ran up, and he fled barefoot into the forest."

"You shot the horse!" shouted the Colonel. "My child, you've saved us. Now we shall reach the yacht safely. Nay, we will take our spoil after all. Paul shall help carry it. My brave girl, my brave girl."

They hurried back to the castle, and the arrangements for departure were quickly begun. The mob of soldiers and servants was collected in the courtyard and the whereabouts of the treasure elicited from

Paul Preobeslas. The threats used to him by Lars Pladja were not overheard by either the Colonel or Desmond, or they might have felt constrained to interfere. They were uncommonly effectual.

The coal bags and their contents were soon ranged anew upon the pavement and distributed among the captives. The share apportioned to Paul was by no means light. Lars saw to this with much pleasure. Then the doors were thrown open, and with the crowd of carriers in the centre and the armed sailors on each side, the return march to the sea began.

CHAPTER X.

THE FORAY LEAVES A RED TRAIL.

THE Colonel strode first with his daughter, and behind, Desmond sought the company of Barr, into whose sympathetic ear he poured the tale of his swift wooing and his hopes, the while he regarded his lady-love adoringly.

What Hilmar had to say to her father seemed difficult of explanation, judging by the blushes and pauses that stemmed the conversation. The Colonel was not slow, however, to gather the drift of her remarks, and though he sighed once or twice, it was a pair of smiling eyes that looked from beneath his shaggy brows at his daughter.

"It can be nothing but joy for me, sweetheart," he said simply, "to know that you have the love of an honest man, and that I

can but be assured Desmond is. That he is a brave one he has amply shown to-night. Truly is it said that nothing succeeds like impudence. Who but an Englishman would have single-handed assaulted a fortress like Skelligen, and won a way out for us? For that feat alone I should be proud to call him son-in-law."

Hilmar looked up at her father with grateful and adoring eyes. "I know one man," she answered softly, "who would have attempted that and more for his daughter's sake. What wonder if I have given over my heart to one who most resembles him of any man I have met! But you don't think, father, that I have been a little—a little——"

"A little coquette? Certainly, my own, and not for the first time either."

"No, you very silly old dad. A little—unmaidenly. You see I have only known Mr. Desmond a little more than a fortnight."

The Colonel laughed and patted the golden head that reached to his shoulder.

"It's quick work for Northern climes—you should have been a Neapolitan, sweetheart. But the future is very spacious before you. You will have ample time and opportunity to forget all about Desmond yet."

"Papa! As if I should ever think of anybody else now. Why, he's *kissed* me."

The Colonel took off his hat to her gravely. "That of course is conclusive," he admitted. "It is impossible to imagine that 'Desmond has ever made trial of a similar incident. Did he show his—er—inexperience?"

Hilmar made a little *moue* at her father as she turned away haughtily. "If he has," said she decisively, "he's got to give the very fullest explanation, or——"

"Or what?" queried her father politely.

"Or I shall certainly give him back——"

"What!" cried the Colonel, "You don't mean to say he's already produced a ring out of this desolation."

"No, of course not, you ridiculous father."

"May I inquire what it is you propose to return to him, then?"

"His—kiss," said Hilmar in faint and guilty tones, and the Colonel's peals of laughter rang down the forest glades, while the blushes raced most becomingly across his daughter's face. "Can't we share the joke, Colonel?" called Barr from behind. "It's early days for laughter yet. I haven't got the nightmare of imprisonment out of my brain yet. I don't think I shall till we're on blue water. I hope to goodness we find the yacht all right."

"If Stefan promised to have the yacht ready for us," answered Preobeslas dogmatically, "you may safely bet you'll find it so. He's slow, is Stefan, but most uncommon sure."

He drew back as he finished speaking and touched Desmond on the arm, leaving Barr and Hilmar to walk forward together.

"Hilmar has told me," he said looking the young man steadily in the eyes.

"I was only waiting till we got aboard—" began Desmond, but the Colonel interrupted. "My dear boy, I know, I know. There is no need for formal declarations between you and me. I have seen more of you during these last ten days than I could in an ordinary six months. I believe you are a good man, Desmond, and I have seen you bear yourself as an English gentleman should when the Shadow of Death lay very heavily above you. But you must forgive an old father when I say that you have only known my child a very short time, and the nature of your foregatherings has been romantic indeed. Are you certain that it is love in very surety that fills your heart for her, and not a passing admiration for a pretty girl—I think perhaps I may call her pretty," said the Colonel in a judicious parenthesis, "with whom you have been thrown in circumstances of intimacy and sympathy beyond the common?"

Desmond smiled a queer little smile. "I think you may take my assurance that I love

her truly, sir. Last night I knew that I loved her enough to die for her—and you. Believe me, I was as happy in the thought as I now am in hoping to live for her."

There was a suspicious moisture in the old soldier's eyes. He turned silently to his companion, held out his hand, and the young man pressed it with a look that was more eloquent than many words. Then as became men who live out their emotions and do not fritter them in idle talk, they returned to ordinary everyday topics. But Desmond's heart glowed within him and upon his face was a glory.

They joined the other two, and as the dark of the pine woods began to lighten before them, Hilmar and Desmond slipped unostentatiously behind. Shortly the bustle of departure would be in full swing. Romance bade them linger a few minutes in the shadow of the forest, where their love had had its awakening, and which they could never hope to see again.

A few hundred yards ahead the others

stepped out into the growing dawn light and strode across the waste of boulders between the woods and the shore. Above the rocks of the bay showed the masts of the yacht, the little R. Y. S. burgee still fluttering at the main. A sigh of relief went up from thirty British throats as they recognized the familiar emblem. They mounted the great stones beamingly and looked down upon their floating home. Beside the taffrail sat an old man, motionless and unresponsive to their gladsome shout. His hand leaned upon the bulwarks; at his feet lay a broken pipe. His whole attitude betokened one tired to the limits of exhaustion.

They ran towards the boat that swung idly from the stern, mounted to the deck, and went towards him. Overcome with the weariness of a long vigil, old Stefan slept the sleep of the just, faithful to his post. They roused him, clapping him heartily upon the shoulder, and he stared at them drowsily. Then his eyes dwelt upon the

Colonel's face, and he bowed his head before him in proud humility.

"I have promised and I have done," said he, and led the way to the saloon. Ranged round the floor six sleeping Russians lay and snored their lustiest, still deep in the influence of the laudanum with which the old man had dosed their vodki.

"The pigs!" quoth he. "Hear them grunt. Ah, the cunning little pigeons; they thought they had a prize. I made a pretence of hiding smuggled spirits for the Lapps, one of noble birth, taking care to be in sight of their watch. Ho! Ho! how they laughed when they caught the poor old man. And within ten minutes they slept like the dead. Will the Excellency throw them overboard? They are but soldiers—scum of Cossacks."

The Excellency declined these drastic measures with thanks. However righteously they might appeal to a Finn, Englishmen could not bring themselves to murder sleeping foes. This was explained with

difficulty to Stefan and Lars while the unconscious prisoners were being lugged ashore. They freely expressed their disappointment, and the opinion that vermin should be destroyed wherever met.

The hard won spoil was taken aboard and a boat set out for the sea-opening, carrying a tow rope. The yacht's bow was set westward, and she glided slowly between the rocks and waited in deep water for the others on the sand, where the fate of the prisoners was still to be decided. Desmond and Hilmar were wandering towards the strand, as they unwillingly left the forest of mingled sorrow and delight.

"I feel it my duty to shoot the dog," said the Colonel, looking to where Paul Preobeslas stood between two sailors. "He's the relentless foe of Poland—ay, and Finland, too."

"We could hardly have him murdered in cold blood," urged Barr, "however much he deserves it."

"Murdered!" shouted the Colonel. "If ever there was a righteous execution due, it is his. Do you know how many innocent lives call aloud for his blood?"

"That may be," answered Barr earnestly, "but we are not appointed his judges. Let be, this time. The vengeance of God must overtake——"

A wild yell came from the yacht, and the men upon her decks gesticulated frantically. The returning boat shot from her sides and spun across the little lagoon towards them, impelled by desperate strokes. They leaped upon the boulders that overshadowed them to see what this might mean.

Out of the forest swung a squadron of cavalry at the gallop, the men bending forward in their saddles, the silt of the shore rising in a cloud beneath their horses' flying feet, the naked blades twinkling in their hands. At their head rode like a storm the lieutenant, and roared them on to slaughter. Half way between the charging line and the shore, Desmond and Hilmar

were wheeling round in hopeless desperation to flee.

A cry pealed from between the Colonel's lips—a scream kin to the agony of the dam o'er whose young the eagle hovers—and springing to the ground he rushed towards them. Two hundred yards were still to run and the horses were but a furlong distant. What hope was there?

The clang of the iron hoofs and jingle of the accoutrements split the silences of the shore. The rattle, as a horse and a rider rolled over among the loose, shot-like stones, grated out hideously. The whistling, labored breathing of the hard-ridden steeds was distinct above the roar of the charge. In fancy the fugitives felt the hot nostrils smoke upon them. With the furious despair that has no hope, they fled. Another yell came from the yacht in Jones' stentorian voice. The thud and rumble as he ran the little carronade down from the bow to the stern made a bass accompaniment.

"Duck, sir, duck," he howled, in the un-

natural falsetto of excitement. "Drop behind a boulder while I riddle 'em."

Desmond flung his arm about the girl's waist and rolled with her to the ground at the foot of a boulder that screened the ship from him. With heaving breast and bursting lungs the fugitives lay face to earth and waited seconds that stretched into æons of apprehension. The grinding crash of the squadron drew down upon them with swiftness horrible. The bellow of the six-pounder filled the air; the scream of the flying grape-shot sang over their heads. Behind them the shrieks of men and the rasp of hoof and sword on the stones made a very inferno of devilish uproar.

They sprang to their feet and stumbled on towards the shore, with scarce a backward look. One fleeting glance only gave them an indistinct impression of a crimson-flecked tangle, out of which dismounted men were dragging themselves slowly. Still without a word they met the Colonel, and he linked his hands to theirs as they ran.

The shore at last, where the boat's prow charged in to meet them as they reached the sand. Hilmar was aboard and the Colonel following. Desmond and the remaining sailors stood beside her in the water for the last shove.

The men who were closing rank a hundred yards away raised their carbines. A sheet of flame rolled from end to end of their line, and a volley belched out at the group. In their passion of hurry the Cossacks took note of no difference between friend and foe.

Paul Preobeslas threw up his hands and bounded forward with a mighty leap; a red blot stared upon his forehead. He fell forward upon his hands nor spoke again. To him had come the vengeance of God indeed.

A dozen of the prisoners rolled upon the sand calling their comrades to stay their fire; one of the waiting boat's crew fell helplessly upon the thwart he stood beside. Colonel Preobeslas staggered, recovered, and pressing his hand above his hip sank down upon

his seat. The boat began to rush out from the shore.

Before the first ramrod was withdrawn from the reload, she shot behind the protecting hull of the yacht, and the following volley smote harmless splinters past her stern. Nor did the answer dally. Again the lanyard of the carronade tightened in Jones' fist, and again her bronze mouth woke the echoes.

As the smoke cleared and the yacht caught the morning breeze and went smoothly out into the waste of glancing ripples, ashore a hideous sight was manifest in the face of the growing day. Piled, writhing and in agony, lay the soldiers of the Czar, and tossed and twined their torn limbs amid pools of blood. Of twoscore men, not ten stood upon their feet in sound body when the echoes fell to silence, Verily the foray left a crimson trail to mark its path.

As the breeze swelled upon the canvas in the larger offing, the yacht bounded forward and drew away from the heaped horrors of

the shore. The grey of the stained uniforms mingled in the grey of the boulders. A few spattering bullets frothed circles upon the sea about her and a chance ball or two found her sides. As she gained away, even these fell far behind her and the figures on the shore grew indistinct. The forest showed as a green line above the sandy foreshore. Soon the land crept under the haze that hovered over the shallows. Forest and rock showed as one. The coast died into a shadowy retrospect across the widening belt of sea.

Down in the saloon they placed the Colonel, and Barr was busy about him with impassive attention. Beside him knelt his daughter and hid her face in the cushions that pillowed his head. Desmond, white-faced and haggard with anxiety, stood at the sofa foot.

With firm, gentle hands the skilled surgeon bared the red bullet hole and probed the depths of the cruel wound. Hilmar, raising her eyes, tried to read his ver-

dict in his face. There was stillness unutterable in the little cabin.

A puzzled look crossed Barr's face. He withdrew the probe draggingly. A spasm twitched across the wounded man's temple, but he made no sound. It was a tremulous hand, however, that he laid upon his daughter's golden head. Then he looked up at Barr with a quick smile and nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I had but a month or two anyway. Sievnitz told me when I was in Vienna last year. The growth would have killed me. But why should I grieve the child before her time?"

Hilmar was staring at him with wondering, desperate eyes.

"Father," she cried. "Father. What is it? You knew and you never told me. And I am to be alone. You will leave me," and she threw herself upon the bedside, wailing.

"No sweetheart, not alone. You will change a poor worn-out father for a brand-new lover, who 'most of all men you have met resembles' me. 'Tis a poor copy I've

set," he went on whimsically, "but circumstances make our lives what they are;" and he patted her bowed head with the smile cheerful as ever on his white face.

It was the fourth day when the end came, and then with the northwestern gale behind them they were racing past the Finland Gulf with every sail set and the foam dashing merrily from her bows. They bore him on deck at his own request, and he smelt the salt breeze hungrily and looked out on the face of the waters. Up from the south and west a mighty fleet rode across the seas. The white ensign of her Britannic Majesty's ships streamed haughtily in the gale. Charley Napier and his dogs of war were loose into the Baltic, and soon the roar of battle would resound before Cronstadt and Bomarsund.

Colonel Preobeslas turned and faced towards the great ships exultingly, the light of triumph in his eyes. "The Lion at the Bear's throat at last," he called, in a voice that was young and strong. "I have seen

my desire upon my enemies. *Nunc dimittis, nunc dimittis.*"

They ran and knelt beside him, but his eyes were for the fleet alone, They glowed upon it with an ecstasy of triumph, as towering over them in mountains of ranged canvas, the great three-deckers swept by. Still gazing, but silent, he watched the helms starboard and the grim prow stack gulfwards, straightening themselves upon the far-off guns of the Czar. He knew now that in very surety the blood of Poland no longer called from the ground unanswered. The tired lids drooped and a strange smile played about his mouth. In a reverie he dwelt upon his thoughts of a righteous vengeance, brimming his heart with a happiness which was already scarcely of earth.

As the flame of life, fed for one moment by this strong fuel of passion, leaped up to the glow of death, his eyes opened once more and yearned upon his daughter. His thin hand sank upon hers, and it sought Desmond's waiting clasp.

"To have and to hold," he whispered, and his smile was a benediction.

As the growing dimness veiled his eyes, they turned once more to where the sails of the warships gleamed on the eastern horizon. A single word faltered from his lips, "Poland"; and with the name the Colonel passed out from the memory of her wrongs.

"He would not have had us wait, sweetheart," said Desmond, as they watched the sun dip seawards with the glow of promised dawn. "He gave you to me; come to me soon, my own."

She put her hand in his with a look that told of trust unuttered. "When you will; I have but you, my love, my love."